THE MAGIC DOLL OF ROUMANIA

By QUEEN MARIE

The Magic Doll of Roumania

"SITTING THERE ON A ROCK, AS IF IT WERE A THRONE—THE QUEEN!"

THE MAGIC DOLL OF ROUMANIA

A WONDER STORY IN WHICH EAST AND WEST DO MEET

WRITTEN FOR AMERICAN CHILDREN

By
MARIE
QUEEN OF ROUMANIA

PICTURES BY
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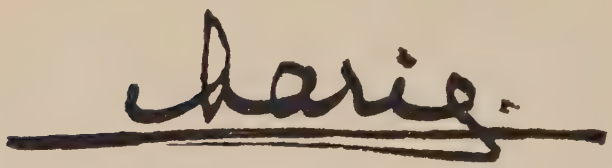
To You
THE BOYS OF AMERICA,
AND THE GIRLS OF AMERICA,
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

A TOKEN
THAT I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN
YOUR WELCOME—
YOUR FRIENDSHIP.

ROMANCE
JOINS TOGETHER ALL PEOPLE
WHO ARE YOUNG IN HEART—
WHATEVER THEIR AGES,
WHEREVER THEIR HOMES.



A Letter to You

Dear children of America:

All too quickly did I pass through your country! It was like a dream which flashed into my life, and was gone.

But not out of my mind, nor out of my heart! And I remember your faces—your many eager, healthy, happy faces, so full of life, of interest, of hope for all that is still to be.

I could speak to so few of you, I had no time to enter your homes, nor to sit at your tables and listen to your talk. But for all that, I have the happy feeling that we could have been friends.

But what could I do for all of you, when I was passing by so swiftly, leaving nothing behind me but a memory which—all too soon—will fade and be gone?

None of us like to be forgotten, and I am no exception to this rule. So I began to wonder what I could do in order that you should remember me.

And so it was that I decided to write this story for you—a simple story, with songs and verses in it, which I hope all of you will enjoy.

And because I am Queen of a far-away country which I know will interest you—a country full of poetry and pictures, of old customs and quaint habits handed down through long generations from father to son, from mother to daughter—I have placed my story in Roumania and among the peasants, for it is they who guard the past.

I have said that mine is a story in which "East and West *do* meet," because I bring a small American girl—little Nancy—with me over the seas. I hope that she will become your friend, as she is mine.

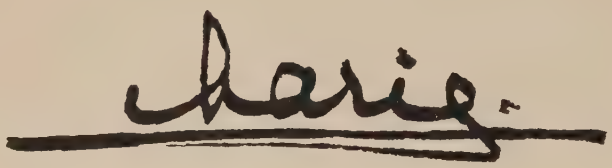
May Nancy's wanderings from plain to mountain, from mountain to sea, become a pleasant wandering to you also.

The songs and verses are my own, but they are inspired by the songs of my country. They are not stately poetry, but they may give you a better idea of the people of this poetical realm. So take them with the rest, for what they are worth!

And you, child of America, in whose home this book has found a place, remember that I have written it with warm love and with a sincere desire that if East and West cannot really meet, they shall at least become acquainted with each other, and grow to become friends—brought closer together by the pen of one who knows how to love and appreciate both.

Therefore, with all of my best wishes, with my blessings also, I send this little book to you. Receive it kindly, and let it keep the memory of my friendship always fresh in your heart.

BUCHAREST,
1929.



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GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

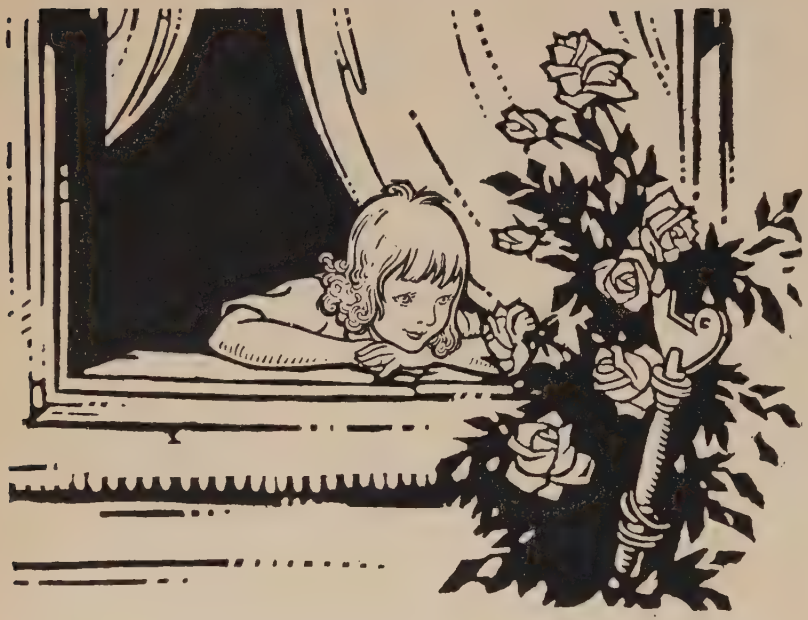
(Markings from Webster's Dictionary)

āle	īce
ärm	ĭll
fin*a*l	ōld
ēve	rude
ĕnd	oil

Florica	Flō-rē′ka
Baba Zoë	Bä′-bä Zō′-ä
Ghita	Gēt′-sa
Radu	Rä′-du
Anica	Ä-nē′-ka
mamaliga	mä-mä-lē′-ga
Dobre	Dō-brā′
la revedere	lä rĕ-vĕ-dĕ′-rĕ
doine	doi-nā′
donita	dō-nēt′-sa
Haiduc	Hī-duc′
Cobzar	Cōb′-zär
Cozonaci	Cō-sō-nätch′-ē
Viscol	Vĭs′-côl
Crivetz	Crē′-vĕtz
Maica Fevronia	Mīk′-a Fĕv-rō′-nē-a
lautar	lä-u-tär′
Tenha Yuvah	Tĕn′-ha Yu′-va

The Magic Doll of Roumania

CHAPTER I



She was called Nancy.

Nancy is a friendly name—don't you think so?

And in an American town she lived in a neat little bungalow with a mottled green roof and a broad front window, into which, in summertime, a rose-bush thrust its long branches heavily laden with red blossoms.

Nancy would lean toward the crimson roses and speak to them, for she loved to speak to all things smiling beneath God's sky. And all things answered Nancy, because her heart was full of love.

"Oh! red, red rose," Nancy would say, "why don't you bloom in winter? Your crimson petals would be so lovely against the snow!"

"I rest in winter, little Nancy. We roses must sleep then so that in summertime we may bloom red."

"All right, little rose," answered Nancy. "I don't understand why you must sleep for long months together; but if you must, you must, and I shall love you all the more because I have you for such a short time." And Nancy kissed the rose on its very heart.

Nancy was a lonely child. She had no sisters and no brothers. Her mother and father had died when she was quite small, leaving her to the care of her grandmother. And so, although she was a dear old granny, who loved her as grannies know how to love, loneliness was often Nancy's lot.

Nancy was ten years old. Her bobbed hair was

as fair as corn when it is ripe. Her eyes were as blue as if two small pieces of sky had been used for the making of them. But above all, Nancy was a dreamer, and she felt a strange attraction toward all that was beautiful.

At each side of Nancy's bungalow stood many other bungalows. None was more neat than the others. All stood as if on parade, ready for inspection; and the grass on which they stood was close-cropped and as even as a carpet. Small steps, set in a narrow stone path, ran up to each door; and each door seemed to be a secret leading into human lives.

Nancy always looked at these doors. They were to her as so many promises out of which wonderful things could come one day. But she knew that no one with whom she talked would understand this feeling; nor could she have found words with which to explain it.

Though many of the bungalows were as pretty as hers, no other one had such a beautiful rose-bush as hers looking in at its front window.

And it was the red roses which were her confi-

dants when Granny was not at hand. Besides, even when Granny was with her, she was old and she loved her arm-chair; while Nancy dreamed of many adventures which could not be lived in an arm-chair! But the roses were ever so much wiser than you might think.

So Nancy sang many a little song to the roses. She was always singing. And this is one of her quaint little songs:

"Red rose, beneath my window ledge,
How very wise you are!
The dews that nestle in your cup,
Have neighbored with a star.

"And every wind that passes by
From north or west or east,
Has brought to you from foreign lands
One little tale at least.

"I'm sure the winds could help us find
The long white road that knows
The way to foreign lands from here.
Oh, won't you ask them, rose?"

And the red rose would answer:

"The world is wide
And cruel. Here bide!
White roads might lead astray.
Go east, go west,
Home's ever best,
By dawn, or dark, or day.

"My roots lie deep,
Nor do they sleep
As mortals think: I know
What I have spied
Where secrets hide
Beneath the silent snow.

"If go you must,
Oh, ever trust
The red, red rose—your friend;
For she'll be near
To guard you, dear,
Where'er your steps may wend."

But though Nancy loved the red rose, despite all of her warnings she ardently longed to see lands far away.

"Granny, what lies beyond our town?"

"Forests and rivers and fields, my child, and more cities, more rivers, more forests—and mountains and the sea, Nancy, the deep blue sea."

"And beyond the sea, Granny?"

"Other countries, Nancy; other towns and cities; forests, rivers and hills."

"Can I get there, Granny?"

"Get there?" and Granny would look over her spectacles at the little girl. "Why do you want to get there, Nancy?"

"To see sights, to learn, to discover."

"Well, well," and Granny wagged her head, "I've discovered enough from my old arm-chair. But the young are ever longing to be off! If they only knew how good it is to sit still!"

"Did you always sit still, Granny?"

Again Granny wagged her head.

"There was no sitting still when I was young, Nancy. I came in a wagon from far away. I and my man had to build."

"Did you build this house, Granny? Did you put on this green roof?"

"No, no, little girl. Your father built this house. He had strong hands, Nancy, and a clear eye that had seen long roads when he was a baby."

"And my mother?" asked Nancy; and when she asked, her voice was very low.

"She had pink cheeks—as pink as an almond blossom, Nancy. But as those of an almond blossom, her petals fell when the young fruit ripened."

Nancy did not well understand what Granny meant. But ever after that talk with Granny, she thought of her mother as of a branch of almond blossoms, standing all pink against the clear sky.

"Are her petals all grown on again in Heaven?" Nancy had asked—because it was to Heaven that Mother and Father had gone.

"I'm sure that they have," Granny had nodded. And she had bent her head over her knitting, and had sniffed as though she had a cold.

"Shall I shut the window, Granny?"

"No, no, child. . . ."

But after that Granny had been silent. And for some reason Nancy had felt that it would be difficult to go on with that conversation.

CHAPTER II

Christmas was near. Snow lay like a white carpet on the ground. And the rose-bush was covered as with a feather quilt, so that Nancy could not talk with it any more. The rose's roots underground were alive for all that; and they too might have told Nancy many things. But she did not know this. For Nancy was of an age when things which you cannot see have no real meaning. And yet in Nancy's heart lay the great desire for all that was wrapped in mystery.

Granny sat now behind closed windows, as near the fire as possible. But Nancy pulled about a sled, and played with the other children in the snow, in the shelter of the double row of neat bungalows. The snow on the roofs of the bungalows was like neat packings of cotton-wool. When the sun shone brightly, the snow on the roofs dripped, and in dripping turned into long, pointed icicles which shone in marvelous rainbow colors.

Nancy longed to get at these icicles. But although the bungalows were low, she was not tall enough to reach up to the height at which they hung so temptingly in their crystal brightness.

Although Granny seldom left the house, she always made one mysterious excursion before Christmas to that part of the town in which the shops were. And when Granny made this excursion Nancy pretended not to know where she was going, in order not to spoil her fun. For Granny, too, although old and bent, had her fun, which consisted in doing kind acts for others. There were not many of her friends left for Granny to be kind to.

Nancy knew that they had all gone to Heaven, because Granny had told her so. Exactly where Heaven was, Nancy had no idea. But as Granny, when speaking about it, had always raised her face toward the sky, Nancy supposed that it must be up there—above the clouds, beyond the stars and the moon. What a wonderful place it must be, right up there! Were the stars very large when seen from Heaven, she wondered.

And up there in Heaven, Nancy's mother bloomed like an almond flower, all pink against the blue sky. . . .

This year when Granny had started toward the "shoppy" part of the town, which was far away from the bungalow quarter, Nancy had helped her on with her bonnet, her cloak and her warm gloves, and she had pulled on her overshoes for her. But she had not asked to go with her because she knew that Granny wanted to go alone.

But when Granny returned with a parcel under her arm, Nancy had peeped out of the window. However, she was hidden behind a curtain, so that Granny could not see that she was being watched.

What could Granny have brought back in that package? It was a rather large package. And when she began to climb up the path and up the steps leading to the front door, Granny, who was not as young as she once had been, seemed to find the parcel heavy.

Nancy longed to run out and help her. But that would have spoiled Granny's fun. And Nancy knew that before Christmas small girls must not

ask too many questions, nor must they poke their small noses into too many corners, nor must they open drawers not meant for their entertainment.

That day at dinner, Nancy had a very innocent face, as if no mysterious package had been brought into the house. And Granny, too, chatted about many things, as if she were hiding something under many words. Both Nancy and Granny were playing their own little games.

CHAPTER III

Christmas had come and gone.

Nancy and old black Sue, the cook, had decorated a small tree with golden fruits and silver tinsel. On the very top they had fastened a large, shiny star. It had been very difficult to fasten on, as it seemed determined not to hang neat and straight, as a star in the sky should.

Nancy's hands had become all sticky over the task, and old Sue's sighs had been many. But finally the star had behaved itself, although it did lean over just a bit.

Nancy had insisted upon red candles, because she wanted them to be of the same color as her friend the rose, who was having her long winter-sleep.

The tree had been lovely—a real success.

And old Sue had stood before it, her hands on her hips, her white teeth shining brightly. She had made all sorts of funny little sounds of pleas-

ure. And then she had given Nancy a warm kiss. "Honey, honey, it's scrumptious. . . !"

And both Nancy and old Sue had been truly proud of themselves. And when Christmas Eve had come, under the lighted tree Granny had seated the strangest little person that Nancy had ever seen!

It was a doll, wearing a white shirt all embroidered with red. Instead of a skirt, she wore a woven cloth of black and gold, simply folded around her and held together by a long, brightly colored girdle. This girdle was wound around and around her waist. The ends of the girdle were little golden tassels. On her feet were queerly shaped sandals. And just imagine! Instead of wearing stockings, her legs were wrapped in narrow linen cloths which were wound with black strings that fastened under her knees. On her head, instead of a hat, she had a many-colored handkerchief. And her black hair was plaited in two long braids.

She was the cunningest creature you ever saw! And so pretty! Her large brown eyes stared at

Nancy, and her lashes were long and feather-like.

"Oh! Granny!" And Nancy had stood there, hands clasped, a look of delight on her face. "Who is she?"

"She is a Roumanian doll!" Granny was chuckling delightedly. "Isn't she charming?"

"Roumanian?" Nancy's face was a blank.

"Yes, from Roumania."

"Where's Roumania?" asked Nancy.

"Roumania? . . . " Granny had repeated the word. Then she had smiled a rather shy smile, which made a thousand little lines run all over her face. "Roumania! Well, dearie, to tell you the truth, I don't know. I did not learn about Roumania when I was young, and you do not yet go to school—as you should have done long ago, and as you will have to do this season, my little girl!"

"But, Granny, she's lovely!"

Granny looked pleased.

"Yes, Nancy, that's what I thought. And at the shop they told me that they are becoming quite the fashion. 'Those Roumanian dolls are the newest thing we have,' they said. So I took the prettiest of all—for my little Nancy!"

CHAPTER IV

It was night, but Nancy was not yet asleep. Drawn close up to her little white bed was a chair. And on the chair sat her new treasure, the Roumanian doll.

Nancy had not yet turned out her light. She was sleepy, but she must still stare awhile longer at this strange little maiden from that far country about which Granny knew nothing.

She was lovely, but what a strange way of dressing! Just a shirt and a gold and black cloth wrapped round her! And those queer shoes! And no stockings—only strips of linen! And yet she really was too sweet in that funny costume! And what large eyes she had!

"If only she could speak," thought Nancy. "If only she could . . ."

I think that it was just then that Nancy fell asleep.

But she awoke with a start. . . . Was some one singing?

Nancy sat up.

Yes! And what a weird little song!

Nancy listened with beating heart:

"Little leaf in the snow, I am lonely
For the land where the carts slowly plod
Through the dust, and the bells call my people
From their work, to the worship of God.

"Where the long corn-leaf blows in the sunshine,
Sits my hut at the edge of the wood.
I could see the tall sunflowers' faces
From the place in the door where I stood."

Nancy rubbed her eyes. Was she dreaming? No! The little voice went on singing:

"Little leaf, I would see, too, the sledges
Cut their way through the deep of the snow,
And would watch the black crows, silhouetted
As they darken the sunset's red glow;

"Or the silvery stretch of the plainsland,
Spreading out 'neath the moon, ghostly white.
And surely, leaf dear, you remember,
The sunflowers faced toward the light.

"They marched, little leaf, oh! so bravely,
In a happy and golden-faced line,
By the edge of the grasses which bordered
That dear little garden of mine!"

And then came a sound like a little sob—and a last stanza, sung in a shaky, small voice:

"For alas! I would go to my homeland,
To the old trodden path brown and bare
Where the two stars still meet to watch sunsets
O'er the hut that I love—over there!"

And there was a sound as of weeping!

Nancy was wide awake now. She rubbed her eyes. . . .

No! Indeed she was not sleeping: for there sat the Roumanian doll, and actually. . . Was it possible? Great tears were running down her cheeks!

Nancy was mute with astonishment! She had never heard of dolls crying real, great, wet tears. Perhaps there was something quite special about Roumanian dolls!

Nancy stretched out her arms and drew the strangely dressed little figure toward her.

How extraordinary! The doll was quite warm and soft.

"Are you alive?" whispered Nancy, in an awed tone.

"Yes!" came the answer in a wee voice. And splash! A great tear fell on Nancy's hand.

"Oh!" Nancy could find nothing more to say. It was all so wonderful!

"Was it you singing?" asked Nancy.

"Yes!" And this time there was a snuffle instead of a tear.

"Are you sad?"

"Yes."

Nancy sat up a little straighter in her bed. She was beginning to feel tremendously excited. Think how wonderful to have a live doll! And how especially exciting for a small girl who had never had a sister!

"Sing one of those verses again, will you?" whispered Nancy. There was a short, breathless silence, and then a small, quavering voice sang:

"Little leaf in the snow, I am lonely
For the land where the carts slowly plod
Through the dust, and the bells call my people
From their work, to the worship of God.

"Where the long corn-leaf blows in the sunshine,
Sits my hut at the edge of the wood.
I could see the tall sunflowers' faces
From the place in the door where I stood."

"Were there so many sunflowers?" asked Nancy.

"Yes; whole fields of them. And they all turned their faces one way."

"What are you called?" inquired Nancy, leaning tenderly over the living doll.

"Florica," said the small voice.

"How beautiful! Florica! None of us are called Florica here."

"It means little flower."

"That's sweet!" said Nancy. "What sort of flower are you?"

"A red carnation," promptly answered Florica, "because that's our national flower, you know."

"Is it?" Nancy was much interested. "But where is Roumania?"

"There. . . . Where the sun rises. . . . Near the Black Sea. . . ."

"Is it very black?"

"No. Only when it's stormy. It can be as blue as a turquoise or as a sapphire. And sometimes it's emerald green."

"Why are you so queerly dressed, Florica?"

"Queerly?" The doll raised her long lashes, and stared with puzzled eyes into Nancy's face. There was a slightly offended tone in her voice.

"Queerly dressed? Why, I am a little peasant girl. All our peasant girls are dressed as I am."

"It is a lovely dress," said Nancy hurriedly.

"Yes," agreed Florica. "We maidens always embroider the waists in which we are to be married."

"But you are not married!" exclaimed Nancy, quite aghast.

"No, no!" Florica laughed a silvery little laugh. "I am a small girl like you."

"I am very happy to have you," said Nancy,

with a deep, satisfied sigh. "I am rather lonely sometimes. But now we must sleep; it's the middle of the night. I must turn out my light. Granny always says little girls must sleep in the night."

"I, too, have an old granny—over there, in our village," sighed Florica. "She is very old, but the flax which she spins is whiter than her hair. In the village they call her Baba Zoë. She knows many things. . . ."

"You will tell me all about them to-morrow," murmured Nancy. "To-morrow we'll . . ." And Nancy fell asleep.

The moon, peeping through the curtains a little later, saw Nancy lying in her cozy bed. And, tucked into the hollow of her arm, lay Florica—Florica, the magic doll of Roumania.

Florica's eyes were also closed. But when the moon sent her rays hovering over the bed, they fell on a great tear which shone like a diamond on her cheek.

Poor little Florica!

CHAPTER V

It was many days before Granny realized what a wonderful doll she had brought home to her little granddaughter.

For to others, Florica was nothing but a doll. It was only when alone with Nancy that she became a living, talking little girl.

But one day Granny, passing Nancy's room, heard voices.

Now Nancy had no intimate friends, and Granny knew that she never brought any one home with her. It could not be old Sue, because she had just been with Granny in the kitchen.

Very softly Granny opened the door—only a wee chink, so that she could see without being seen.

There sat Nancy on a small three-legged stool, and on the floor beside her sat the Roumanian doll. And yet . . . not really the doll, but a little living being who looked exactly like her!

Nancy, her chin in her hands, her elbows resting on her knees, was leaning forward. Her eyebrows, slightly drawn together, showed that she was listening attentively.

It was that queerly dressed little figure that was talking—the Roumanian doll!

Granny caught her breath! Was this enchantment? Magic? Or was she bewitched?

No! This was Nancy's little room, with the pale green paper on the walls, and the small gray

ships sailing in a frieze just under the low ceiling. And that was a real sun-ray which was dancing in through the window, like a small searchlight full of inquisitiveness.

Granny made no noise. She held the door just enough ajar so that she could watch without being seen. And Granny, although old, still had keen ears. This is what Granny heard:

"You must come with me, some day," the doll was saying, "and I will show you many things. And you shall hear the peasant girls sing as they sit all together, spinning on their thresholds. Besides, the sun is so wonderful in our country!"

"Your songs are very quaint," said Nancy, "but I like them."

"Shall I sing you one which the girls sing while they spin?" asked the doll.

"Yes, please do," responded Nancy. And, extraordinary as it sounds, Granny actually heard these verses sung in a wee, melodious voice:

"Spin, little spindle, spin!
See, the sun is peeping in!

To old, old well,
Through corn aglow,
From hill and dell
The young girls go.

"Little spindle, spin your spell!
Maids are meeting at the well,
One girl who weeps
For lover dead,
Hears—from its deeps—
His voice, 'tis said.

"Spin, little spindle, spin!
See, the sun is peeping in!
My waters drink:
To-day's dark sorrow
That draft will link
With Hope's to-morrow.

"Little spindle, spin your spell!
Maids are meeting at the well.
This saddened day

For new love's sake
Shall pass away;
So sleep, to wake. . . ."

The doll stopped singing. Open-mouthed, Nancy had listened.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"I really don't know," confessed the doll, "but the old wells play a great part in our villages, and the girls go down to fill their pitchers, and it is there that they meet and talk. I've also talked to our old well. It is strange how the waters down in its depths listen."

Nancy laughed a bright little laugh.

"What nonsense, Florica, how can waters listen?"

"Oh! But they do!" earnestly declared the little Roumanian. "And the wind tells you secrets, and so do the moon and the stars, out there in the great plains—if only you will listen!"

"And do they also make songs about the winds and the moon?" inquired Nancy, becoming serious. She was thinking that she, too, had talked

to the red rose, and that the red rose had certainly listened.

"Oh, yes! Just hear:

"Oh! soft night, hush,
I hear the thrush
That's singing still.

"I hear the wings
Of tiny things
Upon the hill.

"Oh, tell me, moon,
What do you croon,
Alone, aloft,

"As in vast skies,
The night wind sighs,
So chill, so soft?

"I hear the tread
Of something dread
Which passes by.

"I feel the weight,
Of dire fate
That's drawing nigh.

"God and my heart,
Are but one part,
One pulsing beat!

"Oh, soft night, hush,
I hear the rush
Of angel feet!

"It makes you feel the night. Don't you feel it, too, Nancy?"

"Ye-ess." But Nancy's voice did not sound convinced. "I am not used to verses of that sort. I know quite a different sort. Your verses are . . ."

"What are they, Nancy?"

"Your verses are . . . just a little creepy, I think."

"There is nothing creepy about the night, and the stars, and the wind, is there?"

The doll had perked her head inquiringly on one side.

"No, perhaps not. But the well is creepy, and that something dread which passes softly by! What do you think it is? Great wings, like those of a heavy bat? And why did the boy die?"

"But boys do die sometimes, don't they?"

"I suppose they do. But they needn't in a verse!"

"No, of course they needn't. But that's what makes it poetry."

"Not every sort of poetry is like that. I know some songs which are quite different—jolly ones."

"We're not awfully jolly, we Roumanian peasants."

"Why?"

"Well, I don't really know why. I suppose that my Granny Zoë could explain. But sing me one of your jolly songs."

"Wait a minute, till I remember one." And Nancy looked a trifle shy. "My songs don't come quite as easily as yours—although I often sing when I am with my rose."

But decidedly Florica was expecting to hear one of Nancy's songs, because she kept her head tilted in that amusing way which she had when she was awaiting an answer.

Nancy fidgeted a trifle. Then she began reciting:

" 'Quack! Quack!' said the duck
To the girl in the lane,
'Pray where are you going, my dear?'

"Said the girl to the duck,
'From your question 'tis plain
That you're just a bit forward, I fear.'

" 'Quack! Quack!' said the duck.
'Since you're starting to fuss,
I had better walk on, you'll agree.'

"But just between us,
When he walked he went thus:
Waddle-waddledy. Waddle-dee-dee."

Florica, her head on one side, seemed to be weighing the value of Nancy's song.

"It is not re-e-ally pretty," she said. "It's ra-

a-ther funny, that's all. But it could be funny and still be more of a real song at the same time."

Nancy looked slightly mortified. "What would you call a pretty song, I wonder."

Florica was silent for a moment. Then she sang:

"Little ship, from the east,
As you fly from the sun,
Don't you fear, in the least,
For the race you've begun?

"I can see, little ship,
And quite well do I know,
How your nose, with its tip,
Cuts the waves as you go.

"Do not laugh, little ship,
Till your sides split in two;
For if they dropped apart
Then pray what could we do?

"Who would come, little ship,
And with hammer and plane
Mend your rudder and keel,
'Ere they buffet the main?

"Who would help, little ship?
Would the waves? Or some elf?
Or if not, do you think
I could fix you myself?

"Little ship from the east,
When your voyage is done,
Do not doubt in the least
That your course was well run."

Now it was Nancy who had an expression of doubt on her face. They were really absurd, these two, sitting there together, while the sunlight danced over their heads.

Granny chuckled behind her door. "They are like a couple of little old women being wise about unimportant things."

"It's *pretty,*" said Nancy at length, "but I'm not so sure that it's funny. I don't think that we would call it funny."

Florica sighed. "You see," she explained, "we of the East are not truly funny. We're dreamy, and even our funny songs aren't really gay."

"No! It's not particularly gay, is it? That poor little ship all falling to pieces, and no one wanting to stick it together again?"

"You're right, there. But then you see what I meant when I said that your 'quack, quack' song wasn't *pretty*."

"Shall I try to think of a better one?" suggested Nancy.

"Yes, do! And if you find a really pretty one, I'll sing you the song of the old eagle that loved a flower."

"Now that's funny!" laughed Nancy.

"Not really funny," said Florica, "as you'll see. But first let's have your song."

"This is a regular singing competition," smiled Granny to herself, behind the door. "What next, I wonder!" She held her breath to listen.

And Nancy sang:

"Dinky Doodle taught his poodle
How to say his prayers.
Danky Dat taught her cat
Erect, to climb the stairs.

"Said Dinky Doodle
To his poodle:
'What an able feline!'
Said the poodle
To Dinky Doodle:
'Straighter than a bee-line!'
"So Dinky Doodle and Danky Dat
And the poodle and the cat
Lived happily for evermore:
If that's not true, my story's o'er."

This time the doll gave a ringing laugh.

"Yes, that is funny, especially the 'Dinky Doodle and Danky Dat'! I like the real silliness of it."

Nancy looked pleased. "I know a great many others like that," she boasted with innocent pride. "But please, now; you sing the eagle song!"

And Florica, without more urging, sang:

"Sat an eagle
On a throne,
Proud old eagle,
All alone.

Saw a violet
Growing low
In the valley
Down below.

"Quoth the eagle,
'I shall fly
From my throne
So near the sky
To the valley
Down below,
Where no North Wind
E'er can blow.

" 'Quit my rock,
My sun, my snow,
Quit my throne,
To fly below.

" 'In em'rald dell,
I'll fold my wings,
And shut my eyes
(Like fallen kings)

To every spell
Above the sea,
That I may dwell,
Dear flower, near thee.'

"The violet spoke:
'Nay, Great King, nay!
Prithee consent
To let me stay!

" 'I cannot go!
My heart would break
So near the snow.
Were you to take
My small roots out,
I'd surely die
In icy air
So near the sky.

" 'I'd die beneath,
The sunlit frost—
That shining wreath,
Of regions lost.

" 'Too near the skies,
I could but grieve.
This lair is mine;
I must not leave.

" 'I am too small,
Old Eagle brown,
And thou too large;
Pray keep thy crown!

" ' 'Twas here below
That I was made;
My roots must have
Their moss and shade.

" 'Here must I stay
In moistened sand;
Here was I placed
By God's own hand!'

"On rocky throne,
Old Eagle, rest!
Thy love has flown,
Thy soul's oppressed!

"At mountain's crest,
With heart of stone,
Now guard thy nest:
Alone, alone!

"Kind night, steal softly
As a thief!
Beneath your pall
Conceal his grief!

"With eyes now closed,
Upon his throne,
The eagle sits:
Alone, alone!"

"There you are again," exclaimed Nancy, "being so sad and so poetical that I can't understand what it's all about!"

"It's about an eagle that loved a violet—" began Florica.

"Oh! I know that!" interrupted Nancy. "But it's silly for an eagle to love a flower. It's not his sort, you know. And of course he *had* to shut his

eyes and go to sleep when he was alone, alone! What else *could* he do?"

"Well," explained Florica, "of course that's the way it goes in poetry. I don't know whether a *real* eagle would love a *real* violet or not. I don't suppose that he would ever tell us, even if he did."

"I've never seen an eagle," confessed Nancy.

"Oh! I have," said the doll. "I've seen them soaring with great wings over the plains. There was something so soft and yet so strong about their flight."

"I must be going to Granny now," decided Nancy.

And quickly Granny closed the door.

CHAPTER VI

Witnessing this scene gave Granny something of a shock. But it was not the last shock which she was to receive.

What disturbed her was the knowledge that there was now a secret in the house—something which Nancy was keeping from her. Why had not the little girl told her that the doll was not really a doll?

This disturbed Granny dreadfully. Nancy had always been such an open-hearted child! She had always told her everything. But now Nancy had a secret which she had not offered to share.

As Granny sat by the fire with her knitting, she pondered over this, and shook her head, and murmured to herself: "That comes from introducing foreigners into a household."

She would have done better, thought she to herself, if she had not changed from the usual sort of doll—if she had brought Nancy a fat baby with

pink cheeks and a nursing bottle, or a neat little dairy-maid with a white apron, or a pink-clad, golden-haired little girl doll. Even a Red Indian or a cowboy would have been safer! At least, one knew all about them! And ever since the Indians had been living in reservations, they had given up that scalping business—or so she had been told. And as to the cowboys—of course they did use fairly strong language! But if they were only dolls . . .

Granny was growing confused. She shrugged her shoulders somewhat peevishly—and the gesture made her drop a stitch. What a nuisance! The stitch had to be picked up! Bother!

While she was picking up the stitch, she could think of nothing except what she was doing. But then her thoughts came back again:

Dolls! Why, of course it was a doll which she had brought home! And at the shop the young man with the free and easy manner had held up the Roumanian doll for her, turning it around and around for her inspection. "This is the very newest we have," he had said. "They're coming

to be quite the fashion. We've sold 'em beautifully, quite a lot of 'em. And they're all hand-embroidered, too! And cheap at that, quite a bargain!"

And he had scratched his head. Granny distinctly remembered how he had scratched his head.

She had put on her spectacles and had examined the doll carefully. It was really very attractive, although why it was Roumanian rather than anything else, she had not understood. But people do give outlandish names to things nowadays—especially since the War, when so much new geography had been invented to confuse people's minds.

But that was indeed a quaint dress which the doll wore, something new, and not dear for the hand-made embroidery. No, really not dear at all.

So Granny had paid for the doll, then and there, and had brought it home with her—a doll. . . .

But now?

Granny let her knitting drop into her lap.

Yes, it had been a real singing-competition. What a lot of stuff about eagles and violets, ships and sunsets and old wells, stars, moon and what-not! And then Nancy, with her Dinky Doodle song! At this Granny chuckled. One verse had stuck in her mind so that even in bed she could not get rid of it:

> "Said Dinky Doodle to his poodle:
> 'What an able feline!'
> Said the poodle to Dinky Doodle:
> 'Straighter than a bee-line.' "

And that stupid verse was always coming back to her mind, whatever she was doing—washing her hands, counting out her linen, even reading her Bible: "Straighter than a bee-line . . . straighter than a bee-line. . . ."

"Too stupid really," sighed Granny. And such sentimental stuff about young girls passing through the corn. That was healthy enough. Young girls would always pass through the corn, she supposed, even in the hottest sun. But there

"A DOLL AND YET NOT A DOLL."

was a twist in all these songs which the doll had sung. "Something—" Granny did not quite know how to express it, "something—something foreign!" That was it. It was a mixture. It had an echo of something else in it, of something which Granny knew nothing about. Even the corn did not sound like American corn somehow. It was different.

"Yes, that comes from bringing strangers into the house. But a doll . . .?" And Granny found herself at the point she had started from: a doll and yet not a doll. And Nancy keeping the mystery all to herself! Had not Granny asked once at supper:

"Have you given a name to your doll, little girl?"

"Yes, Granny. I've called her Florica."

"Florica? That's a strange name, Nancy!"

Nancy had blushed a little. "Yes, Granny, but it suits her I think."

"Did you invent the name?"

"No-o, Granny, not exactly. . . ."

"What do you mean by 'not exactly,' child?"

Nancy had not answered. And Granny had looked at her sharply over her spectacles.

"What are you thinking about, Nancy?"

"About Roumania, Granny."

"Have you found out where it is?"

"Sort of. It lies near the Black Sea, and has mountains and rivers and peasants and wee huts. And the sunflowers grow all in a row, and peep in at the windows because the huts are so small. And there are clouds of dust on the long roads; and on the roads are people who are not in a hurry, as they are here. . . ."

"Gracious, child! Where did you get all that from? Out of a book? I had no idea that you read so much. And where did you get the book from?"

Again Nancy had been silent, and again her cheeks had become unusually pink.

Of course Granny should have said: "I know quite well where you get all that stuff from. Your doll is not a doll—and—"

Again Granny sighed. It was all very perplexing! And what *was* the world coming to!

She had seen too many changes in her day. Had she not come from far away in a covered wagon over, goodness, what roads! They weren't really roads—they were mere trails.

But she had been young in those days, quite young! And it had been on that long wandering that Jack Cruston had fallen in love with her, and she with him.

Yes, and they had been married by the side of the trail, by the old parson who was trekking along with them to the far place. No doubt it had been a long journey, but it had not seemed long to her because of Jack Cruston.

Granny was smiling now; some sweet memory was floating through her mind: "And that mountain-meadow. . . . One mass of white flowers. . . . Dark hills in the background, and still darker firs." She would never forget that mountain-meadow, nor the smell of the smoke rising from the fire, which Jack Cruston had built for her because the evenings and the early mornings had been chilly in spite of the flowers in the grass.

A long road. . . . Life was a long road. . . . And what changes since those days in the covered wagon, since the days when Jack Cruston had been young! How his teeth had flashed in the sunshine, and how strong had been his arm when he swung his ax, felling the trees that hindered their advance! Dear Jack!

And now Nancy spoke of Roumania! Great cities had sprung up where the prairies had been. Jack Cruston had died a very old man; his back had been bent, but even with bent back and dim eyes he, too, had liked to talk of the mountain-meadow with the white flowers. Those were the pictures which God stamped on your mind because He wanted you to remember them—beautiful pictures which never fade and which even dim eyes can see.

And now this new talk about Roumania! And dolls were no more dolls, but sat in the sunshine, singing songs about eagles, wells, spindles and corn-fields. Granny grunted. She did not like it! The sight of that doll singing songs and arguing was uncanny.

There had been too many changes since her young day. Things went too quickly. Of course the automobile was an improvement; yes, yes, she did not deny it. But all these jangling street-cars in the center of the city, these buildings which wanted to pierce the clouds—Towers of Babel, she called them— One day God would be angry that humans were trying to build straight into His sky. No, no, there was something daring about it, according to her good old Puritanical ideas. . . . And Roumania, indeed!

And there was Granny back again at the point from which she had started, and whence came all the disturbance: that Roumanian doll!

CHAPTER VII

It was approaching seven o'clock, and old Sue had just pulled down the blinds. It was late March. The snow was all gone, and the first spring flowers were poking up their heads, listening to the call of the sun and to the whisper of lengthening days. But old Sue did not approve of open windows after sunset—not for Granny at any rate. But then, old Black Sue hated the cold on her own account—which was quite natural, wasn't it?

On the small table beside Granny's arm-chair was a glass bowl full of snowdrops and yellow crocuses. Nancy had put them there this morning. She had picked them herself, and then she had kissed Granny. Nancy often kissed Granny, but there had been something special about those kisses this morning.

"Granny, you love these crocuses, don't you? The little wood beyond our road is full of them.

And the snowdrops, Granny; you love the snowdrops, don't you?" And there she had stood, with her eyes more than ever like two small pieces of sky.

"Yes, I love the crocuses and the snowdrops."

"And you love me, too, don't you, Granny?"

"Bless the child, what's she talking about?"

Nancy had laughed, answering Granny's laugh, but there had been a queer little note in her voice, and she had put up her arms and kissed Granny hard; never had she kissed her so hard before. She had even pushed Granny's cap all on one side.

Then the little girl had asked to be allowed to go for a picnic in the woods, and to pick some more flowers, "Because you *do* love crocuses, don't you, Granny? And I'm taking Florica with me. We'll be back, sometime, Granny."

And so now, Granny looked at the clock—seven! And Nancy was not yet back. Black Sue had drawn the curtains; supper would soon be ready. And again Granny felt Nancy's kisses on her cheek—such strangely insistent kisses, like those of one who . . .

Granny actually jumped up from her chair, although she seldom moved very quickly now.

"Nancy!"

No answer.

"Nancy, Nancy!"

Were not those foot-steps coming up the front path?

"Nancy, Nancy!"

Granny stood listening.

"Nancy, Nancy!"

No, there was no one on the path outside! Granny had moved to the window, had pulled up the blind. No, no! No one!

Granny stood pressing her hand to her heart. Why was she suddenly so frightened? After all, Nancy often went to the wood, and it was not far away. Nancy loved gathering flowers. So had Granny when she was young; and again the mountain-meadow rose before her mind—that beautiful mountain-meadow, full of white flowers, with the hills as background.

"Nancy!"

There was a ring of fear now in Granny's voice:

"Nancy! Nancy!"

But no answer.

With dragging tread Granny moved across the

room toward the kitchen.

"Sue," she cried. "Sue, Sue!"

The old black woman came hurrying out to the door.

"Where is Nancy?"

"Law-zee!" exclaimed Sue, seeing Granny's face. "Lawzy, Lawzy!"

She stood wiping her hands on her apron.

"Nancy!" breathed Granny.

"Land's sakes alive!" lamented the old servant, whose eyes looked as if they would pop out of her head. "What de matter wid dat chile now?"

". . . Not . . . come back . . ." moaned Granny.

"Lawd bless yo', Honey. 'Tain't so late, is it?"

"But she kissed me so strangely before she left!" Granny was moving back toward her arm-chair. When she reached it, she sank down into its cushions, "sorter like a empty sack, like," as Sue afterward explained to a neighbor.

"But dearie me! How come you carry on so, Missis? I'll go right straight and look for dat young 'un!"

And then and there faithful old Sue ran out into the night to discover what had become of Nancy.

She searched the little wood and then the village beyond—every nook and cranny of it.

There sat poor old Granny in her chair all the

night through. And when Sue came back she came alone—without Nancy!

"Ole Sue cain't find her, she cain't! De little rascal! Old Sue's nigh dead! Ole Sue's heart done cracked right in two! She's a little no 'count, so she is!"

And flop went old Sue, down on her knees at Granny's feet. Then she covered her head with her apron, and burst into tears.

Oh! naughty, naughty Nancy!

CHAPTER VIII

What had happened to Nancy?

It is not so easy to explain what *had* happened to her.

That sort of thing doesn't happen to everybody in everyday life. I know it has never happened to me—nor has it happened to you, either, I imagine.

But I'll try to make you understand it, although it was rather extraordinary!

You see, the night before, Florica had been telling Nancy so many interesting things about Roumania that finally Nancy had asked:

"But can't I get there?"

And Florica had answered: "Yes, you can if you will do as I tell you."

"Of course I will," said Nancy—because, you remember, she was always so eager to know what the rest of the world was like.

"Then listen!" And Florica had whispered

something into Nancy's ear. I really don't know what she told her! But it was on the next day that Nancy, as you will remember, had asked permission to go to the woods; and that Granny, who was a kind Granny, had said, "Yes." And . . . well! . . . Nancy never came back!

If you ask me, I think that it was all schemed, arranged, and carried out by that little rascal of a doll, Florica!

Anyway, this remains a fact:

On the morning when old Sue had come back quite desperate, after having searched all night for Nancy—on that self-same morning, you see, Nancy awoke to something quite unexpected.

Just listen!

Nancy awoke in a wee white room upon which her eyes had never before rested!

A ray of light was dancing in through the smallest window that she had ever seen, and on the sill of that tiny window stood a flower-pot, with a red geranium growing in it. In the farthest corner of the room was a huge, bulging hearth which touched the ceiling, but the ceiling was so

low that the hearth had no need to stretch very high to reach it.

Nancy felt rather stiff. What was she lying on? It certainly was not her own soft little bed!

She raised herself on one elbow, and peered around.

She was lying on a sort of wooden bench, and under her head was a pillow of rather rough linen with an edge of embroidery. She was covered with a thick kind of carpet-blanket, striped with many colors: orange, green, blue, black, red, yellow, and a sort of terra-cotta brown. Never had Nancy seen so many colors together. And none of the colors seemed to clash with the others. It was certainly an attractive rug—but where were the sheets?

Really, this was very strange! There lay Florica, close beside her. But Florica had turned into a real little girl of about her own size! And beside Florica lay two smaller children, and also an animal of some sort. It was not a dog. What was it? What, indeed, could it be?

This time Nancy sat up and peered over the

"A PIG! DID YOU EVER HEAR OF SUCH A THING!"

three sleepers to discover what sort of animal it was. It was all curly, and a sort of orangy-brown in color. Its curls were not silky, but rough and hard-looking, and among them were caught pieces of dead leaves.

Nancy rubbed her eyes. All this was indeed very strange! And how prettily that inquisitive sunbeam pushed its way through the scarlet geranium: the flower was a flame! But Nancy must find out what that fuzzy, curly animal was!

Suddenly it stirred, sat up on its haunches, grunted, and turned toward the stranger a long head with flopping ears, tiny eyes, and moist snout. A pig!

Did you ever hear of such a thing! A chestnut-colored piggy-wiggy, with bristly curls, and with shy little eyes, half hidden in the fat of its face.

"Well, I never!"

This time Nancy made as though to quit this so-called bed, upon which children and piggies slept together. She dangled her legs over the side, the palms of her two hands pressed down on the boards, and made ready to spring to the floor.

She had a feeling that the pig was laughing at her. He had more expression than ordinary pigs. And Nancy, although she highly disapproved of the position which he occupied beside the sleeping children, could not help comparing him, to his advantage, with the American pigs which she had seen. This one was much nicer. He did not look so naked. And instead of having, as other pigs have, hard straight bristles which would hardly cover a scaly skin, he had curls. In fact, this pig was all rust-colored curls.

"I hate the idea of having you sleep on one bed with us, if this hard thing can be called a bed," said Nancy to the pig. "But I think that you're a great improvement upon American-English pigs."

The pig looked pleased. He flopped his long ears, made a funny, jerky motion, grunted, and then, head high in air, moved the flat front part of his snout in the most amusing way.

Nancy felt that she was going to laugh out loud, but she put her hand over her mouth. She did not want to wake up the others.

But somebody was opening the crooked little door in the wall near the hearth!

Nancy, suddenly feeling almost frightened, lay down again as quickly as she could, and pulled up the striped rug until there was little of her left uncovered. But she kept a close watch on the door, forgetting, for the moment, all about Master Piggy-Wiggy.

The door opened slowly, and the first thing that Nancy saw was a large bundle of dry branches. Could a bundle of sticks walk all by itself? But no, the sticks were on somebody's back! Whose?

Nancy stared with all her might. The person—whoever it was—was quite hidden by the faggots.

Bump! Now the bundle was on the ground. And there stood a very, very old woman.

Nancy caught her breath and pulled the cover still further over her.

A witch! . . . Yes, there could be no doubt of it whatsoever! That old woman could be nothing but a witch!

And she, Nancy, was caught in the witch's hut!

And the fuzzy piggy-wiggy was a bewitched prince.

And the red flower in the window had no doubt been, once upon a time, a princess—a real princess in a silk dress, with pearls round her throat. And now the princess was a geranium in a pot! Of course she would rather be a geranium than a pig, but all the same . . .

Nancy shuddered, but decided to have another good look at the witch. What was she doing?

Nancy peeped from beneath her cover.

The witch was leaning over the hearth, breaking bits of branches, and poking them into the furnace door. Of course it *was* a furnace! That was the right word for a witch's hearth. What was she going to cook in her furnace?

Nancy stared hard at the witch.

She was very, very old and quite bent. She could not straighten out. She was dressed rather differently from ordinary witches: she had a white shirt of very coarse linen with an edge of black embroidery, and around the lower part of her body was a skirt—or rather, a black piece of stuff

which had been wrapped around her. And this cloth had a red edge. There was also a broad girdle of thick red cloth around the witch's waist, which seemed to hold her shirt and skirt together. On her head she wore a black and red handkerchief, tied under her chin; very little of her hair was to be seen, but that was muddy gray in color.

She had a long nose, and her chin seemed to be trying to reach up to meet it. The eyes under her bushy eyebrows were dark, and reminded Nancy of polished black cherries.

Curiously enough the witch did not look wicked at all. She had a face which was kindly. And certainly she was quick about lighting the fire, which almost immediately began to crackle with a cheerful sound, filling the small room with a pleasant odor of wood smoke.

What would the witch do now?

She drew a small three-legged stool out from a corner behind the hearth, sat down on it, and began stirring something in a black pot which she placed on the burning sticks.

Of course that was exactly what a witch would

do: cook something in a black pot. And then the witch began to sing. Yes, witches always sang over their black pots. "Incantations"—wasn't that what they called their songs? And they cooked toads, and serpents, and strange herbs. And then they mixed them with nasty things, although, of course, snakes and toads were nasty enough without anything nastier!

But stretch her neck as she would, Nancy could not manage to see into the pot.

The witch was not singing in English and yet Nancy could understand what she sang! That was queer, indeed!

"White frost on my head,
White flowers for the dead!
Bright flame burn,
Old earth turn!
Bitter the bread,
Restless the bed,
Of those grown old!

"Dim mist on my hair,
Dim eyes which stare

At days gone by
And hopes which die!
God keeps the gate
To homes which wait
For those grown old!"

Then the witch turned her head and looked at Nancy. Nancy felt her heart give a great jump, yet . . .

The witch was smiling at her! She had no teeth, but her smile was as kindly as Granny's smile at home!

CHAPTER IX

"So Florica has brought you here, has she? Did you sleep well, little chicken?"

"Funny old creature!" thought Nancy. "Evidently she knows all about Florica, but I wonder if she knows that Florica is really a doll? Why does she call me 'little chicken'? And why can I understand what she says, although I'm quite sure that it's not English that she is speaking?"

"I was not here yesterday," said Nancy. And she felt sure that it was a rather silly thing to say.

"No, you certainly weren't. But our bed is large enough for many, and Ghita keeps the children warm."

"I suppose that's the pig," concluded Nancy. "But probably the old witch knows nothing about hot-water bottles, or she would not use Ghita."

There certainly were not many things in this

white-washed room. It was much too small to hold more than the wooden bed—which was really only a large seat—the huge hearth, a table, and that heavy painted chest against the wall. It was a decorative chest: green, with red tulips and red carnations painted on it. Nancy wondered what was inside.

"I just wonder, how came you here?" asked the old witch.

"I'm rather confused about it myself," confessed Nancy. "Florica simply said that I must go to sleep, and wake up somewhere else."

"That sounds easy enough," nodded the witch.

"And Roumania is far away, isn't it?" asked Nancy.

"Far from where?" inquired the old woman.

"Far from America."

"Vai!" exclaimed the witch. "Is that where Florica brought you from?"

"Yes," nodded Nancy. "But what have you to do with Florica?"

"I'm her granny," said the witch.

"You!"

"Yes. Don't you like the looks of me?"

"Then you are Baba Zoë! And you are not a witch?"

Nancy was not quite sure whether she was disappointed or relieved.

"A witch! *Vai!* No! Although I do know many a little thing."

"Then Ghita is not a bewitched prince?"

"God preserve us, and the good Virgin Mary!" And the old woman devoutly crossed herself, half turning toward a small icon hanging close up to the ceiling in one of the corners.

"So Ghita is a bewitched prince, is he? And what else have I bewitched in this house?"

"I thought that perhaps the geranium . . ."

"That the geranium . . . what?"

"Perhaps had been a princess!"

"Vai! Vai!" The old woman clapped her hands together.

"But, little chicken, there aren't so many princes and princesses wandering about the roads nowadays!"

"We've none in America, and we don't really want any," declared Nancy democratically. "But we don't mind *seeing* them!"

I think that Nancy felt just a shade of disappointment. No witches, no princes, no princesses! Only a pig sleeping beside the children to keep them warm!

"I wish that Florica would wake up," she said. For she was beginning to feel rather uncomfortable.

"Poke her! She is as lazy as sleeping waters," declared Baba Zoë.

Nancy leaned over the doll of yesterday, and shook her gently.

"Florica!"

Florica sat up with a start, and in waking she also awoke the children—a small boy and a small girl—who started up, and stared at Nancy out of enormous, round, brown eyes which were encircled by unusually long lashes. Ghita, with a grunt, jumped from the bed, and scurried across the floor, taking shelter between the painted chest and the wall.

"Well!" cried Florica, with sparkling eyes. "Here we are!"

"How did you do it?" queried Nancy.

"Sent you to sleep in the forest! You remember the yellow crocuses, don't you?"

"Yes, and the first violet which we found."

"Then we sat down, you remember?"

"Yes."

"And do you remember an old crow which was sitting on a branch overhead?"

"Yes, and you began saying funny things to him."

"Quite right! But what do you remember after that?"

Nancy drew her brows together. She was making a great effort to think.

"I can't quite remember anything else . . ."

"No, of course you can't. I did all the rest!"

"With the help of the crow?" asked Nancy.

"Perhaps," teased Florica. "But I don't give away all my secrets."

"But how could we get here all in one night?"

"Perhaps *she's* the witch," grinned old Zoë.

"Can Roumanians do such things?" asked simple little Nancy.

"But we don't know as much as you do," declared Florica. "Anyway, not about machines, and electricity, and power plants, and concrete roads! And not every one of us has an automobile and a refrigerator. Nor can we have radios which bring concerts, and speeches, and sermons right into our houses. And we don't have telephones all over the place."

"What's the child speaking about?" asked her granny, putting her fingers to her ear, as if her hand were a trumpet.

"But she has not explained how we came here!" complained Nancy.

"Florica was always a wise one," declared Baba Zoë, looking tenderly at her grandchild.

"And how did you become a real little girl?" was Nancy's next question. "I'm so confused that I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or on my feet. And poor old Granny, waiting for me for supper! However shall I let her know where I

am?" And suddenly our little American had large tears in her eyes.

"Come, Nancy!" cried Florica. "I'll show you the cherry-tree in full bloom, just outside of our house. And Radu and Anica will come also while Bunica prepares the *mamaliga* for breakfast." And she threw her arms around her friend's neck.

"Mamaliga?" said Nancy. "What's that?" But as she spoke, a great tear rolled down her cheek and splashed the floor.

"Come and see the cherry-tree!" insisted Florica.

And so, hand in hand, the two small friends ran out into the sunshine.

CHAPTER X

And what sunshine it was! Like melted gold, flooding all things!

Nancy stood on the threshold, drawing in the pure morning air in great gulps, as if she were thirsty.

Quite close to the door stood a cherry-tree in full bloom. Its blossoms were so thick and so white that they seemed to give out light. At its foot grew little groups of light pink and periwinkle-blue hyacinths. They were not at all show hyacinths. But for all that, their perfume was so intense that it filled the air. And there were a few daffodils of the simple double kind, which were proudly yellow, though they were small and their stalks were thin.

There was no real garden around this house, which in fact was nothing more than a hut. There was no neatly cropped lawn, no tidy stone path leading to the door. Everything was crooked and disheveled. Even the grass grew only in tufts, and certainly it had never known a mowing machine. But there was something attractive about it all—as well as something unkempt. Picturesque would have been the word for it, had Nancy known it.

Nancy turned around to look at the cottage. It was a funny, square little box of a thing, and like everything else, it was somewhat crooked. There were no sharp angles anywhere. It looked as if a

child had modeled it with chubby, awkward hands. Its roof was too large for it, and looked top-heavy. It was thatched with dry corn-leaves, and a lean, gray cow was comfortably chewing the overlapping leaves—which proves to you that the cottage was not very high. Smoke was actually curling out through the thatched roof itself, because—strange as it may seem—the house had no chimney anywhere!

On one side of the house there was that which may once have imagined itself to be a garden, and which still had the remnant of a fence. But garden and inclosure had both crumbled away, only to add to the picturesque untidiness of the place as a whole.

All around the base of the hut was a beaten earth ledge which somewhat resembled a seat, and upon which stood pots and dishes of various shapes. A somewhat meager company of very fussy hens were picking among these pots, and strutting in and out of the front door, which ridiculously resembled an open mouth too much on one side of a face. Nancy continued to consider this the front

door, but the truth was that the modest hut did not boast of a second door.

Baba Zoë's house could not in any way be compared with Granny's bungalow. There was no kitchen, no bathroom, no refrigerator, and no shed for a Ford. It was the queerest, dearest little house that Nancy had ever seen. In fact, it was more like a toy house than a real one. But how exactly the right thing that cherry-tree was, tickling the shaggy maize roof with its bloom-laden branches! That was a perfect picture.

"I like it," said Nancy, with a deep sigh of contentment. "But I suppose it's not the season for sunflowers?"

"No, no!" protested Florica. "The sunflowers come in late summer or autumn. See, none of the trees are green yet, except the willow."

"Would Granny like it, do you think?"

Florica put her head on one side, in the way so peculiar to her.

"Somehow, I'm not quite sure that she would."

"There's no arm-chair," suggested Nancy.

"And no shiny electric stove," added Florica.

"And no bedrooms upstairs," said the little American.

"There is no upstairs at all!" confessed Florica.

"And then, Granny would hardly like to have Ghita sleeping with us," mused Nancy.

"No, I don't think that she would," agreed the ex-doll. "And she would not approve of having only one bed for everybody together. Nor would she care for the idea of having no sheets, even for that one bed. Nor would she approve of cooking in the bedroom. Nor would she hang her supply of onions in the room which you call—I think—the living-room or the parlor."

"It's the living-room when it's large," said Nancy, somewhat pompously.

"Neither would she approve of our rough grass, would she? And she would think it all wrong that the cow should feed upon the thatch," added Florica.

"Tell me," asked Nancy, "how did you really get me here? And how is it that I understand all that you and your granny say, and that you understand me?"

"There are mysteries in the world," teased Florica, "and even if Bunica—that's my granny, you know—isn't a witch, I might be one!"

"That doesn't explain how I crossed the ocean in one night, to wake up in Roumania."

"No, it doesn't," agreed Florica provokingly.

"Are you never going to explain?" asked Nancy.

"Perhaps not!" laughed Florica. And she began dancing about until the black braids of her hair went flying about her face as if they were alive.

She tucked up a corner of her black skirt, in order that she might be unhindered, and her legs flew about almost as much as her braids.

Her small brother and sister, the twins, who had been solemnly sitting upon the beaten earth ledge among the hens and the pots, sucking their thumbs, jumped up and joined in the fun. Suddenly Nancy felt that her legs could not resist that gay circle, and so in a moment she, too, had joined hands with the others in the ring.

From somewhere came the sound of a flute, playing the queerest dance music that you ever did hear; but they were all whirling around so quickly that Nancy could not see who was playing. Everything was a blur, and the irrepressible Florica was singing at the top of her voice—which was much louder ever since she had ceased to be a doll. And this was her song:

"Wake, Mother Earth!
Awake, awake!
Thy sleep is done;
Comes now the sun
That beams with mirth:
Awake!

"See, Mother Earth!
Behold, behold!
Love's bow is bended!
The Spring has ended
Gray Winter's dearth:
Behold!

"Hush, Mother Earth!
Be calm! Be glad!
The buds now break!
The dead awake!
'Tis Spring's rebirth:
Be glad!

"That's a spring song!" cried Florica. And so suddenly did she let go the hands of the others who were swinging with her in the round dance, that little Radu and Anica went flying to right and to left, as if they were a couple of bundles.

And Nancy, before she realized what was happening, found herself caught up in the arms of some one whom she had not even noticed while she was dancing. And that sudden embrace saved her from the undignified fate of the twins.

"Oh, goodness!" gasped Nancy. "I beg your pardon!"

"No pardon needed," exclaimed a pleasant voice. And Nancy found herself looking up into two large, blue-gray eyes, shaded by ink-black lashes.

"RADU AND ANICA WENT FLYING."

"Oh, I didn't see you!" cried Nancy.

"But *I* saw *you,*" said the one who held her in his arms.

"Don't be so horrified, Nancy! That's my big brother, Dobre, the shepherd," cried Florica. And teasingly she sang:

"Dobre! Oh, Dobre!
Where are your sheep?
Earth is wide and
Waters are deep!

"I can hear how they bleat by the pond
On the rim of the far and beyond!

"Yes, that is Dobre! And his sheep love him. And so do the girls, because he has the finest eyes in the village, and because he knows how to play such beautiful tunes on his flute."

Nancy stared up at Dobre. She had never seen any one like him before. He wore a shirt of coarse linen, gray-white in color, with trousers to match. On his feet were the same queer sort of sandal-

shoes as those which Florica wore, and horsehair thongs were wound about his legs up to his knees. A very broad leather belt, encrusted with brass buttons, encircled his waist. On his head was a high sheep-skin cap, and over one shoulder hung a sheep-skin cloak. He really looked as if he had stepped out of a story-book, and as if he were exactly the sort of shepherd boy who might follow the Star of Bethlehem, or fall in love with a princess—with a *real* princess.

Suddenly Nancy felt very shy and self-conscious. Never before in her life had she seen any one so good-looking as Florica's older brother.

"Those were Father's sheep," explained Florica. "He was killed in the war. Mother went to look for him, and died on the way back from Moldavia, without having found his grave. We stayed with Bunica. The twins had only just been born before Mother left, but they did not die as so many babies in the village did. But they've never been very gay, little Radu and Anica. However, they are no trouble."

There stood Radu and Anica, two diminutive

reproductions of their elders, staring with overlarge eyes and solemn faces, as if they did not know how to laugh. Even while they were whirling about in the dance, their faces had been solemn little masks.

"What are you called?" asked Dobre, pointing at the little American with his rough wooden flute.

"Nancy," said the little girl.

"When I go into the hills with my sheep, will you come too, Nancy?"

Nancy really did not know what answer to give. She turned to Florica, and seized her hand.

"Would you like to go, Nancy?" asked Florica.

"Not alone," whispered Nancy.

"I, too, would go with you," said Florica. "Our hills are wonderful, you know. And no one plays more lively *doine* than Dobre."

"What does *doine* mean?" asked Nancy.

"Love-songs," explained Florica.

"Love-songs?" Nancy looked puzzled. "Are they nice?"

"They are the nicest songs we have," declared the shepherd boy. And his beautiful teeth flashed

in a gay laugh. "Come along to the river's edge this evening when the sun is low, and I'll play you some. And Florica will sing. Good-by!"

But Dobre did not really say "Good-by!"

What he really said was, *"La revedere!"*—which means the same thing.

Dobre moved off, turning once or twice to look back and wave his large fur cap.

"He is going to fetch his staff and his sheep," explained Florica.

"Has he had his breakfast?" anxiously inquired Nancy.

Florica laughed. "He has a lump of *mamaliga* and an onion in his pocket, and there is plenty of water down in the little stream under the willow trees."

Nancy had no idea what *mamaliga* was, but somehow she did not think that an onion was exactly the food for any one with such beautiful teeth and eyes as those of Dobre, Florica's brother.

CHAPTER XI

Nancy was soon to discover what *mamaliga* was.

Baba Zoë appeared on the threshold of the small hut, shading her eyes against the sun.

"Florica, Florica! Come and eat the *mamaliga* while 'tis hot!"

Quite like a witch she looked! So small, so bent! And her nose so close to her chin!

"Come along, Nancy! You take Radu's hand, and I'll drag Anica along with me. *Mamaliga* is best when it's hot."

And Florica, like a fussy mother, hurried everybody back into the hut. Several frightened hens got mixed up with Nancy's legs, and just as she was stepping over the threshold, out came Ghita with absurd, stiff little hops. He ran straight into Radu and knocked him down. The hens screeched, scurrying off with a flutter of dusty wings. Ghita looked amused, as if he had done something clever. But Radu, not in the least dis-

turbed, scrambled to his feet again. His face expressed neither pleasure nor annoyance. Never in her life had Nancy seen anything so stolid.

"He hardly looks real," she thought to herself, "in his white shirt and trousers, high fur cap, and leather belt. Quite like Dobre over again, but in a small size. And with brown eyes instead of blue ones!"

"Will he also be a shepherd one day," she wondered, "and carry an onion in his pocket—and a flute in his belt?"

"Sit down," said Baba Zoë.

Nancy looked about for her chair, but there were no chairs. There was only the three-legged stool, and the old woman was enthroned upon that.

"The floor's not hard," laughed Florica. "It's only beaten earth!"

So Nancy sat down upon the floor. And besides, the table was so low that it was not more than a foot above the ground.

In the center of the table stood the mysterious black pot, and set all about it were plates which were so deep that they were almost bowls. By each

of these plates there was a wooden spoon. And instead of bread, there were onions! The table, about a yard wide, was made of rough wood, and had three short, carved legs.

This was not the sort of meal which Nancy had been accustomed to, but she was quite ready to enjoy it, because she was hungry. But first she must watch, and see how the others would proceed. She did not want to give herself away, and perhaps manners were different here: one could never know!

"Make haste!" cried Florica, putting her spoon into the black pot. "You've never yet tasted *mamaliga*. It's the best food in the world."

And stretching her hand toward the pot, Florica dug out with her spoon a large lump of heavy yellow stuff. And each of those around the table did the same. Radu and Anica did this as solemnly as they did everything else. Nancy, imitating the others, managed to secure her share.

If Granny had asked Nancy what *mamaliga* was, the little girl would have described it as rather stodgy porridge which was made of corn, and

which seemed to be the only thing—except onions—that the Roumanian peasants ever ate. It was bright yellow, and had a pleasantly earthy odor. But it certainly would have been better with cream over it. However, no cream was offered to Nancy, nor tea, cocoa, or coffee.

But after every one had eaten his fill of *mamaliga,* a wooden pot which had a lid, and which Florica called a *donitza,* was handed around, and every one took a deep draught of fresh water from it.

As to onion—Nancy did not touch it. She had no desire to eat raw onions!

There were neither muffins nor griddle cakes, nor even bread; no eggs, no cookies, no sausage cakes: not one of the many good things which old Sue prepared for breakfast at home. There was little ceremony about the meal. And there were no napkins. Nancy was not quite sure that she approved of all of these differences from the things and the customs to which she was accustomed, but at least they were new and rather amusing. It was like playing at being somebody else.

Baba Zoë munched very slowly because she had no teeth. Judging by her, it certainly did not seem that there was any dentist in the village. But each of the others had gloriously white teeth, and never did Nancy see any one with any gold teeth.

Baba Zoë said quaint things. She never expressed herself as anybody else would have done. All of her sayings resembled proverbs or verses from the Bible; she spoke in pictures. Nancy liked to listen to her, but very often she did not entirely understand the things about which Baba Zoë talked.

Once, when Florica was leaning over Anica to wipe her nose, the old woman said:

"A star fell when the twins were born."

"Where did it fall?" asked Nancy, her eyes round with astonishment.

"Beyond the rim of the world," said the old woman.

Nancy looked more and more puzzled.

"Yes," nodded the old crone. "That was because her mother drank of the well's water during the full moon. And the full moon must never

peep into the well whilst a woman is drinking."

"Why?" asked Nancy, in an awed voice.

"Because the waters become as heavy as silver, and if the Haiduc should come he would know that she had a pain in her heart."

"Oh!" murmured Nancy, because she really did not know what to say. But dearly would she have loved to know who the Haiduc was.

Luckily Florica, having finished wiping her small sister's nose, had heard her granny's last utterance.

"The Haiduc, Nancy, is a wonderful fellow: half robber, half hero. He is a wanderer who comes, goes, appears, disappears and reappears at unexpected moments. He rides the swiftest horse in the country. And all the girls love him because he's so brave and handsome, and yet as mysterious as a legend."

"Will I see him?" asked Nancy, and there was a quiver in her voice.

"One seldom sees him nowadays," said her friend. "But you will hear of him in many a song. I'll sing some of the songs to you down by the

river, under the willows, to the piping of Dobre's flute."

"But I would like to *see* him," insisted Nancy.

"Perhaps you'll meet him when you go to the hills," said Baba Zoë.

"Have you any more wonderful people of that sort?" asked the small American.

"Well, we've the Cobzar. He's our wonderful song-singer, on winter nights, or in autumn when we're husking the corn."

"And don't forget our gypsy with the fiddle," nodded old Zoë. "They're a bad lot, the gypsies! But music runs out of the tips of their fingers."

"That's funny," said Nancy. "But please tell me more about the Haiduc."

"He is undoubtedly the best-looking man in the world," explained Florica, "but nobody is ever invited to his home. He usually comes on a night of storm, and he knocks at the window of the hut where the prettiest girl lives.

"The flames all dance when they hear him coming, and the smoke rising from the chimneys becomes so anxious at the sound of his galloping

horse, that it tries to lie flat on the roof like a mist, so as not to be seen."

"And once a strange woman kissed him on his lips," added the old one, "and ever since he has known no rest, but he wanders endlessly all the world over, looking for her who gave him the kiss."

"His cloak is black," continued Florica. "And his horse's hoofs leave glowing marks, when at night they pass over a swamp."

"Is his horse black, like his cloak?" asked Nancy wide-eyed.

"I've never seen it," declared Florica, "but I've heard some say that it is black. But others say that it's white, and still others, that it's piebald. But I've also heard that it's pale-colored, like the horse in one of the last chapters of the Bible."

"He must be wonderful!" sighed Nancy.

"Oh, indeed he is!" laughed her friend. "I hope you'll see him. But come along now; we'll run down to the well, and help Bunica clean the dishes." Then, turning to her small brother:

"Scurry, Rady! Go and look after Ghita and the other pigs."

And this fact, also, Nancy learned, among many queer and unexpected things: there was no bath anywhere, not even a tub. And there was no soap. All washing of little girls, as well as of dishes and linen, was done down at the well. But what did that matter? Was there not a mysterious being, the Haiduc, wandering somewhere through this country on the swiftest horse ever bred: a strange fellow—half thief, half hero—whom every girl loved?

"Would I also love him, if I met him?" wondered Nancy. For the strange atmosphere into which she had suddenly been magicked was making her feel strangely poetical and unlike her usual self.

CHAPTER XII

That was a wonderful day!

Everything was different and new. It was really like living in a story-book. And, I am sorry to say, so absorbed was Nancy in all that she saw and heard, that she did not have much time to think of poor Granny, sitting all alone by the fireside in her old arm-chair.

Nearly all of the houses of the village were as small as Baba Zoë's hut. And they were the dearest little dwellings which Nancy had ever seen, but although they were beautifully clean, every family had a curious hospitality for animals. They did not consider dogs and cats alone as household animals, but often shared their habitations with pigs, hens, lambs, kids, and even sheep. Only cows, calves and horses seemed to have their separate sheds—or at least that was the impression which was left in Nancy's mind after her first

inspection of this Roumanian village in the plains.

"Ours is a very poor village," explained Florica to her friend. "And Bunica's hut is the poorest in the community. When we go wandering with Dobre and his flock, I will take you to an aunt of ours, who lives in a prosperous mountain village, and there you'll see much larger houses, and eat good cream and bread and eggs. Here we eat eggs at Easter only, then Bunica makes *cozonaci*. A yearly treat, you know—nice twisted ones, like fat braids, with sesame seeds sprinkled on top. In Moldavia they make *cozonaci* which look like priests' hats."

Florica was curiously wise. She explained things wonderfully well. She seemed older than her age. She was not much taller than Nancy, but she was certainly more grown up, and she always had an answer for each of Nancy's questions—and her questions were many and varied.

"But I think that your houses are dear!" declared Nancy. "I love the tumbly corn roofs. And you have such a funny way of placing the houses sideways to the road. In our country, a

bungalow usually looks at the street with its front windows and its front door. Yours don't."

"That's because we build our houses with their backs to the winter winds, especially on the plains. Our terrible snow-wind is called *'Viscol'* or *'Crivetz.'* We never put any windows in the backs of our houses. If we did, we'd freeze in the winter. Our doors open out into our yards, and each of our houses turns one shoulder to the highroad—so to speak. Also, you see, there's a great deal of dust on our roads."

"I remember that the song which you sang said so," mused Nancy. "Can you remember how it went?"

"Little leaf in the snow, I am lonely
For the land where the carts slowly plod
Through the dust. And the bells call my people
From their work, to the worship of God,"

quoted Florica.

"Yes, yes! that's it!" exclaimed Nancy. "It was the very first song that you sang me."

"When I was a doll!" said Florica.

"When you were a doll," repeated Nancy.

"Well, now you see our long, dusty roads, with the carts which pass so slowly over them, and are never in a hurry. And our really old songs and verses always begin with a quaint little line about leaves or grass: 'Oh, green leaf of the willow . . .' or 'Three leaves of the rose bush! . . .' or 'Bitter leaf of the wormwood . . .' or 'Green grass in the meadow! . . .' It's a funny little way of ours! I'd like to tell you why we do it, but I can't, because I don't know. It simply has always been so."

"You know a great deal," said Nancy.

"We learn from the time that we are born; we girls must be useful almost before we can walk."

"Have you been to school?" asked Nancy.

"I have not had time," declared Florica. "I should go, but Bunica is so poor and so old: I must help her in the house."

"Doesn't Dobre help her?" inquired Nancy.

"Not in the house!" Florica's voice was almost shocked. "But, of course, he keeps the sheep.

He's away during many months of the year up in the hills with his flock."

"But what does he do in winter?" persisted Nancy.

"Oh, in winter our men rest!"

"That's rather a long time to rest in," declared the practical little American.

Florica shrugged her shoulders.

"It has always been that way," she explained. "Of course, he clears away the snow when it's too thick in front of the door. And he leads the sheep about on the fields, beginning the moment that anything which they can eat pokes through the melting snow."

"And what do you do in winter?"

"Oh! Bunica and I spin and embroider. Then, of course, we cook and wash, and tidy up, and feed the chickens and the pigs, and look after the children, and—oh, there's enough for us women to do!"

"Why doesn't Dobre feed the pigs?" suggested Nancy.

"Oh, he does, sometimes."

"But you seem to do much more than he does," insisted Nancy.

"That's in winter," repeated Florica.

"All the same, it seems a waste of time for a big boy like that," declared Nancy.

"That is the way it has always been," pronounced Dobre's sister. "And he plays on his flute."

"Pleasant, but not useful," said Nancy.

Florica laughed. Her teeth were as white as Dobre's.

"We're not practical and efficient, as you are! We don't try to change from the habits of former generations."

"That's a pity," declared the small American.

"But wait until you hear Dobre playing, down by the river," said Florica.

"We'll go and get a piece of cold *mamaliga* to take with us. And then we'll hunt for Dobre and his sheep. It is lovely down by the river; the willows are always the first trees to turn green. . . . And Dobre and I have much to sing about the Haiduc!"

How could Nancy resist such a tempting proposal?

She would go any distance to hear about the Haiduc. . . . Oh, if she could only meet him!

CHAPTER XIII

Florica had taken off her sandals and the linen which was wrapped around her legs. "To walk far with real comfort, you must walk bare-footed," declared the little peasant girl.

"But really, I can't," protested Nancy. "I'm not accustomed to it; it would hurt me badly!"

"Well, well, you must do just as you like best," agreed Florica. "But I'm going to take you rather a long way. You know, we peasants can walk all day long without growing tired. You have no idea of what long distances Dobre can walk with his sheep. And at night, he'll sleep in a ditch anywhere, and all of his sheep will sleep beside him on the edge of the road."

"But what about automobiles?" inquired Nancy.

"They are troublesome, because of the dust which they raise," answered Florica. "But in the night Dobre sleeps so soundly that dust can't get

into his eyes. I doubt whether even the lamps wake him. Besides, there are not many motors at night—especially on our crossroads, which are always bad and rough, and which are even more so after rain."

"Nothing is too bad for a Ford!" declared the little American stanchly.

Florica, who was leading the way, had left the highroad, and was pattering along ahead on a narrow path worn by passing feet.

As far as Nancy's eyes could reach, the country was as flat as a table, and there was hardly a tree to be seen anywhere, except in the villages, which, from afar, resembled groves. Most of the fields were still bare, although in some places there were large stretches of green, where autumn seed had already sprouted; but there were also patches of snow still remaining here and there.

"Curious ground, ours of Roumania!" remarked Florica. "There can be snow, mud, water, and dust on the same road. We seem to be naturally untidy. At any rate, in the plains no one tries to keep things neat. Not even Nature does!"

Nancy laughed. She was enjoying herself hugely. This was all so strange, and so different from home. She had always longed to see the world, and here she was in a far country which was, as she had explained to Granny, "near the Black Sea." Of course you could not see the Black Sea from here, but she would ask Florica—or perhaps Dobre—to take her there.

There were only two matters about which Nancy was not perfectly happy. One was the thought that Granny might be anxious. And the other was her own uncertainty as to how she could continue to get on without soap. Of course soap could be bought, but she had brought no money with her. Granny always did the paying, and so Nancy never had any money in her pocket.

"What will we do about poor Granny?" she inquired of her friend, who seemed wise beyond her years, and who usually simplified affairs by accepting, without argument, anything which could not be helped. Nancy had noticed a curious thing about Florica: she never seemed astonished at anything. She remained calm on all occasions and

met every situation without flurry or surprise.

"Can't we send her a message?" insisted Nancy. "You managed to whisk *me* over the seas, and therefore I am sure that you can send her a *message*."

"I shall," nodded Florica mysteriously. "She'll receive a message that you're well and safe and happy."

"Will a crow tell her, or shall we send a telegram?" Nancy's ideas were widening. Certainly in America she would never have thought of any way to send the message except by telegraphing, or telephoning, or broadcasting on the radio. But here in Roumania, for some reason, these practical inventions seemed far away: they seemed to belong to quite another world. They could be replaced by simple—although slower—things. Was she not in the land of romance, in a domain where people were not in a hurry, in a country where they tilled their fields with oxen instead of horses and tractors? And was there not a mysterious being called the Haiduc, who stole the young girls' hearts? And soon she was to hear songs about

him! Perhaps one day she might even meet him in the flesh!

"I'll let her know you are all right," promised Florica, "but I'll not fix a day for your return. You've a great deal to see, you know. And perhaps I could not so easily bring you back here a second time."

"And you won't tell me how you did it?" asked Nancy.

"No, no!" laughed Florica. "There are certain spells which one must not break!"

"You are much gayer than you were when you were a doll," remarked Nancy.

"Ah! We Roumanians are sad when we are away from our country. For then we suffer from what we call *'dor.'*"

"And what is that?" asked Nancy, who stopped walking to hear her small companion's explanation.

"How shall I explain?" said Florica. *"Dor* is a sort of longing which takes hold of your very soul: a sense which makes you sad for the desire of something. It may be the remembrance of a

place, or the yearning for a face, a country, or a perfume. You can have *dor* for the fields or for the sunshine—for the fragrance of a flower, the taste of a cake, the sound of the sea— But in our songs, we usually feel *dor* because of our love for our country."

"Has the Haiduc *dor* for anything?"

"Yes, yes!" Florica nodded her head and her eyes became very large. "He has *dor* for a feeling of peace. But he has done so many things, good and bad, and he has stolen so many hearts, that he can have no true peace. And so his *dor* is partly a yearning for all of his departed loves, and partly a craving to bring to an end his eternal wandering."

"I don't believe that I understand very well," sighed Nancy. "It's so different from the feelings which we have. None of my friends at home have such strange longings to tell about."

"Ah, but we're close to the Rising Sun!" said Florica solemnly.

That certainly sounded awesome, and sudden pictures of a swollen sun rose before the little

American's eyes—of a sun so huge that you could not keep yourself from stepping into it.

For a moment she was quite speechless, absorbed with that curious vision of the "Rising Sun."

The path along which the two girls were trudging was now dipping toward a rather flat valley which lay between the fields. They had come upon it very suddenly. There was water here: a sort of swampy river which occasionally broadened out into small lakes.

The water was full of last year's reeds and rushes. And weeping willows, in groups, seemed to be keeping watch over the sleeping waters.

Farther on, there were larger trees: silver poplars and alders. But only the willows were green. They hung gracefully over the edge of the waters, as if their branches were yearning for something hidden down there out of sight. Everything in Roumania was like pictures or poetry.

Shiny clusters of marsh-marigolds made the edges of the swamp gay with brilliant yellow.

With a cry of pleasure, Nancy bent down and picked up a great bunch of them.

"Oh! They are lovely!" she cried. "I wish that I could take them to Granny!"

"You can take some to Dobre, for him to put behind his ear."

"To put behind his ear?" repeated Nancy, as if she had not heard correctly.

"Yes; whenever one of our boys wants to look smart, he always puts a flower behind his ear, under his cap; and happy he, if the flower has come from his sweetheart."

"But I'm not Dobre's sweetheart," protested Nancy.

"But you might become his sweetheart," suggested the sister.

"But I'm so small, and he's quite a large boy."

"A large boy can love a small girl! Or would you rather wait for the Haiduc?"

Nancy was staring at Florica, whose eyes were like dark stars. The two little girls were a strange contrast, as they stood there, each with her two arms filled with yellow flowers: the one so fair, in

her neat little blue dress and her solid American walking-shoes; the other of dark skin, with coal-black hair, bare-footed, and in that picturesque peasant garb.

Then suddenly Florica began to sing:

"When I die, do thou tell her,
Oh, Mother,
To lay on my heart
A flower as red—aye,
As red as the blood of the soldier
Who dies for his home
And his country.

"A flower as red
As her lips,
Which I kissed
When the moon was awaiting
A glimpse of her face
In the well's deep
And silvery water.

"Tell her to forget,
Oh, my Mother!

"But thou,
Thou surely must know,
Blessed Mother of mine,
That the flower,
The crimson red, slowly swaying flower
Which blooms near the crossroads,
Stands there as my token and symbol.

"That flower has grown
From the heart of my heart:
Do thou pluck it, oh, Mother,
When the dews of the evening
Have jeweled the fields.
And at night, when she's sleeping,
Pray take it, and lay it
Upon her white breast, while she slumbers:
Forgetful, she slumbers."

"Is that a Haiduc song?" asked Nancy.

"No! that's the Cobzar's song. He's not as wild as the Haiduc, and he loves more kindly."

"All of your songs seem to be about love," complained Nancy.

"Of course they are! Don't you like them?"

"Well, there are other things to sing about, aren't there?"

"About Dinky Doodle?" laughed Florica.

"Well, yes! And other things."

"We have no songs of that kind," explained Florica. "Ours are always full of feeling, of sentiment. They are full of *dor*—of longing for something which we can't quite reach. We small girls learn these songs from the large girls; we never hear any others. Our mothers sing them to us while we're still quite small; we grow up with them in our hearts."

What was Florica talking about? Nancy thought it all very hard to understand, and rather peculiar—exactly as Granny had thought that Florica's conversation was, when she listened to it through the chink of the door. But Nancy, being young, did not merely put it all aside as "foolish, unhealthy stuff," as Granny would have done. She did not understand what it was all about. The Dinky Doodle song was more akin to her feelings and understanding, but she felt the charm of these

strange verses, felt the strange *dor* which ran through them, and which awoke some echo within her.

I suppose that what made little Nancy feel so uncanny was that sudden meeting of East and and West. She had come from so far away—from a new world to an old one. And facing her here, in these large black eyes of her newly made peasant friend, was a whole world of tradition, poetry and romance, which belonged to a life of which she had never heard—a life of suffering and of patience, full of the almost Oriental acceptance of many events which weighed heavily upon these peasants. And these peasants had turned those events into poetry, in order that they might sing away the grief which otherwise would have been too heavy to bear.

Of course Nancy understood none of this clearly. But something, something which was unusual, which was a trifle sad, and which was rather wonderful, was pulling at her heart-strings. And it seemed to her that she vaguely comprehended the beauty of that lonely, swampy land-

scape, of the tenderly greening willows, of the yellow flowers massed on the water's edge, and of that quaint, small figure of the peasant girl in her embroidered shirt and narrow black skirt.

It was all very unexpected. The blue eyes and the brown stared into each other, a world of meaning in each—a world of emotion which neither could fathom. Each felt an unexplained urge toward the other—an urge which neither language nor frontiers, neither climate, habits nor prejudices could prevent.

"There is Dobre, over there!" cried Florica.

And seizing hands, the little girls ran toward a white figure standing among the trees.

CHAPTER XIV

"Dobre, Dobre, here we are!"

Dobre stood leaning back against the mottled gray trunk of a poplar. He held his flute to his lips, and strange little trills came from the rustic instrument—quaint, quivering harmonies, both gay and plaintive, full of elusive charm which made your heart ache with strange longings.

There was sunshine in Dobre's music, and there were tears, and every color of the awakening spring. In it there was a cry to the heavens, and the memory of long roads, of mountain tops and of winter nights when the stars are on guard! There was a cry of love in it, and one of warning also. And the sound of feet could be heard, moving in slow procession toward peaceful churchyards at the end of long roads—of roads as long as life.

Dobre did not immediately put down his flute when the girls approached, rather out of breath

and with arms full of shiny, yellow flowers which nodded among their leaves.

"Listen," whispered Florica, putting a finger to her lips. Nancy listened, while her chest heaved up and down from their swift running. Nearly exhausted, she threw herself on the ground. But Florica stood upright. A dreamy expression came into her eyes, and she sang, as if to the accompaniment of Dobre's flute-playing:

"Oh, heart of mine, listen:
The Haiduc is calling
From the far away end of the world.

"Seven ravens he's speeding
O'er seven deep valleys,
O'er seven deep sapphire seas.

"There are seven bright suns
Which now hark
To the clang of his charger,
And seven wan stars which are leaning
Adown from the heavens
To watch the wild rider
Who passes so swiftly.

"Poor heart of mine, beating
As the surge of ten sea tides,
You hear the wild pace
Of the Haiduc's black courser:
While seven deep valleys he crosses—
And seven dark lovely seas.

"As hail and as earthquake
He comes—as a tempest—
With seven black ravens
Which soar high above him.

"As a brazen bell's ringing
His voice takes its flight:
As cherubim singing
On God's Easter night."

It was strange to hear Florica's childish voice sing such wild words. Nancy listened with all her heart, while Florica went on:

"Be wary, my spirit,
For clouds are concealing
The face of the moon
In the mist of the evening.

"For the moon knows the tale
Of the Haiduc's bold courting:
He plucks each warm heart
As a flower that's waiting;

"Then throws each away
And is deaf to love's pleading,
And blind to the anguish
Of dying love's glances.

"Oh, Mother, my Mother,
When the Haiduc is calling,
Restrain me from going:
I cannot resist him!

"His ravens come laden
With dusk, through the grove.
Every star, every maiden,
Is trembling with love!"

The song and the playing broke off together.

Dobre, thrusting his flute into his belt, threw himself down on the newly sprouting grass.

"Are you not tired, little stranger?"

"I think that I am. My feet ache. But, for some reason, I have no time to think about how I feel. Everything here is so curious!"

"What seems most curious to you?" asked Dobre, showing his beautiful teeth.

"Your songs," said Nancy. "And the way that the pig sleeps with the family."

Dobre rolled over on his back, pulling his fur cap far down over his eyes. He laughed a low laugh.

"That seems strange to you, does it? But, you see, our houses are small, and pigs are precious."

"Precious!" exclaimed Nancy, with a somewhat disgusted face.

"Of course they are precious! And so are my sheep."

"Perhaps you also sleep with your sheep in the house?"

"No!" laughed Dobre. "The house is too small. But when there are sickly lambs, of course we take *them* inside with us."

"Well, I call it queer," persisted the small American citizen. "We have not habits of that

sort at home. Granny would not like it at all."

"We live near the Rising Sun!" smiled Florica, as she threw herself down beside the others. "That's an explanation for everything."

What large sad eyes her two peasant companions had, thought Nancy as she looked intently at them. Even when they laughed their eyes remained sad.

"The land of the Rising Sun"; was that it? But then it ought to be a joyful land, a land of contentment, if it was so near the sun! These thoughts passed vaguely through Nancy's mind, which seemed topsy-turvy, because so many new ideas were jostling each other to crowd into it.

"But please tell me more about the Haiduc," she prayed. "He *does* interest me so!"

"I know a wonderful poem about the Haiduc," said Dobre, "but as my voice is breaking, I cannot sing just now. So I shall recite it to you. The old gypsy used to sing it—and our mother would sit on the doorstep, listening. The doorstep was sometimes white in the moonlight. I would sit beside her, my head on her lap. I remember the

touch of her hands on my face and hair—and the moon made her eyes strangely bright. . . . Before us lay the plain, a silver secret."

Nancy was leaning on one elbow, gazing intently into the shepherd's face. Dobre was wonderful. Perhaps he was not really a shepherd at all, but a prince in disguise.

"Listen," said Dobre, laying a strong hand upon hers—a hand with roughened skin:

"Ah, dost thou remember,
Oh, sister of mine,
How the Haiduc came galloping,
Riding his coal-black
And fiery courser,
To steal my poor torn heart away?

"And dost thou remember,
Oh, sister of mine,
That his eyes were as black
As the coals of deep hell,
And his laugh was as gay
As a song in the dawn

When the corn is still
Drinking the dew?

"And dost thou remember
That round his strong waist,
He was wearing a girdle
As bright as the rainbow
Is after the storm—
Aye, as bright as God's garden?

"Then dost thou remember,
Oh, sister of mine,
How he carried my heart,
My forlorn, fragile heart,
To a far away place,
Which was fearsome and silent:
Where one star benighted,
Stood watching the heavens—
As watches the shepherd
On Christmas night.

"And dost thou remember
The cry my heart gave

When he cast it away
Without heeding?

"Oh, sister of mine,
Pray thee haste to the place
Where it lies!
For our mother sits watching
The desolate hearth-side.

"And only a mother
Can touch, without paining,
A heart which is broken,
When Haiduc comes riding
With girdle so bright,
And with eyes which are blacker
Than coals of Gehenna.

"But one evening the gypsy sang a song which had something in it that made Mother's hand tremble, as she stroked my forehead:

"Yonder hut is lonely
Because Death looked in.

Death like a stranger
Sat down on its threshold,
Waiting for that which would be.

"Like a spirit in pain,
A small flame was dancing
On the hut's crumbling hearth:
Death gazed down upon it,
And Death's gaze put it out.

"Take my heart, also!
For you are quite welcome,
Death, to possess it.
For my threshold is broken,
And my hearth is naught
But a grave.

"My father has followed
A strange red-lipped woman:
To Hell has he followed her.
And the shooting star
Which fell from the heavens
Has turned to a stone
Down here upon earth!"

"That's shuddery!" cried Nancy. "But will you say it all over again?"

Dobre did as she wished.

"I don't like it," declared Nancy. "But there are some things which one doesn't like and yet which one cannot leave alone."

"But I'm not going to recite shuddery verses to you always," promised Dobre. "I am going to lead you to the hills when the apple blossoms are all in flower and when the swallows begin to come back."

"That's in April," said Nancy.

"We don't calculate by the names of the months," explained Florica. "We say, 'When the swallows come back,' or, 'When the apples are ripe,' or, 'When the maize wears its feathers,' or, 'When the snow disappears,' or, 'When the earth is sleeping.' Then we all know what season is meant."

"We speak in pictures," added Dobre.

"I wonder if they would understand me at home, if I spoke in that way to them," pondered Nancy.

"Probably they would learn to," said Florica.

"I'm not so sure," doubted Dobre, wagging his head. "In America everything is so rapid, so large, so rich! The people there would not want to reckon their seasons by the coming of the swallows, nor by the ripening of the apples. Is it true, little stranger, that your houses touch the clouds?"

"Mine doesn't," protested Nancy.

"But in some places they do, don't they?" insisted the shepherd.

"Yes. In New York, and in Chicago, and in Philadelphia—in all of our large cities, in fact. But even there, they don't *really* touch the clouds. They only seem to!"

"I would imagine that I was climbing up to the stars," sighed Dobre.

"Do you want to climb to the stars?"

"Sometimes . . . out on the hills, when I am lonely, and my soul is full of *dor*."

"I know all about *dor*," declared Nancy, importantly.

"If ever you leave us again, little stranger, I shall have a great *dor* for you," said Dobre.

"But of course I shall have to leave you," sighed Nancy. "I can't remain here forever, *can* I?"

"But that need not prevent me from wishing that you would," said the shepherd.

A curious feeling came over Nancy: a dreamy sensation of being no more herself. Was Dobre, with his wonderful eyes, casting a spell over her? Or was she still under a spell which Florica had cast over her on that first night when Nancy had carried Florica up to her room, while Florica was only a doll: on that night when Nancy had wakened to hear her sing that first song about her native land—a song full of *dor*.

"Florica, what was the first song which you sang to me on Christmas Eve, when I took you up to my bed?"

"I can't be sure," said Florica. "For sometimes we change the words of our songs. We make them up in part while we are singing. For it is the sky, the sun, the wind, the dust, the air of our country which cause these songs to well up out of our hearts. Let me see if I can remember it. Was this the way it ran?

"Where the long corn-leaf blows in the sunshine,
Sits my hut at the edge of the wood.
I could see the tall sunflowers' faces
From the place in the door where I stood.

. . . . . .

"And surely, leaf dear, you remember,
The sunflowers, faced toward the light.

"They marched, little leaf, oh! so bravely,
In a happy and golden-faced line,
By the edge of the grasses which bordered
That dear little garden of mine!

"For alas! I would go to my homeland,
To the old trodden path brown and bare
Where the two stars still meet to watch sunsets
O'er the hut that I love—over there!"

"Yes, that was it!" exclaimed Nancy. "And what a shock it was, when I discovered that it was my doll that was singing."

"Fate intended that I should go to you, Nancy!

Your friend, the rose, was sleeping her winter-sleep, and so you had no one to talk to."

"Oh! She had a rose as friend, had she?" asked Dobre, drawing up his dark brows until they were fairly under his cap. "Just the right sort of companion for the little stranger!"

"But you've never heard the Dinky Doodle song, Dobre," laughed Florica.

"Oh, he would not like it, Florica! And it would not sound right, now and here: it would sound silly!" protested Nancy.

"It's growing late!" said Florica. "We must be going home. See, the sun is setting!"

And it was there, by the sleeping waters, that Nancy first saw the wonderful Roumanian sunset. She saw many another after that first one, but the glory of that evening ever remained with her as a vision—although it was in her heart rather than in her mind. All the poignant beauty and yearning of that land of plains and of poetry seemed revealed to her in the glory of that wonderful sight.

The sky had turned into a stupendous furnace

of vivid red, orange, amber, mauve and violet, the splendor of which was reflected in the quiet waters. It was continually changing and growing in intensity, until at last it seemed that it must set the whole world aflame. Then, ever so gradually, the colors paled and paled, until they faded into green and gray.

But an astonishing afterglow remained, which made one side of every tree, of every bullrush, and of every blade of grass even, glow as if it were on fire. And every object, even the smallest, cast a long, black shadow.

In that last blaze stood Dobre, like a lighted taper, playing upon his flute. All about him his flock turned into shadows, and became one with the color of the earth.

Nancy stared at him. He was like a vision, mysterious, wonderful. He seemed indeed a prince in disguise.

And as she and Florica moved homeward, hand in hand, she turned back more than once to gaze upon that graceful figure, standing upright and lonely, a graying statue in the gathering dusk.

CHAPTER XV

The apple-trees were in flower and the swallows, by hundreds, were returning from the south.

Dobre, Florica and Nancy had been wandering toward the hills for several days. It had been a slow advance, for sheep do not move quickly, and all of the long, long journey had been made on foot.

This was a wonderful experience, although it was tiring at first. And it was all part of the strange dream in which Nancy seemed to be living.

First they had traveled over endless roads, which cut across the plains as if they were gray bands holding the earth together. Then the little party had quitted the high roads for the narrower ways leading toward the highlands, and the roads had become less broad and more twisting, and there were fruit-trees in full bloom growing along their sides.

"THERE WAS A SPELL ABOUT DOBRE'S MUSIC."

It was a long, long wandering, and it might have been dull, had it not been for the many quaint and sometimes wonderful things which Florica had to relate, and had it not been for Dobre's flute.

There was a spell about Dobre's music that took hold of you. Nancy felt that she could follow him and his music to the very ends of the earth.

And one day they came to a lovely spot. Never had Nancy seen a place more mysterious—nor one more full of romance.

There stood a wondrous white building encircled by high walls. It had almost the appearance of a fortress, but there was no feeling of war about it, only one of peace—of deep, white peace, surrounded by God's green.

This was a convent, which nestled like a great white bird at the foot of wonderfully wooded hills.

The beeches were just breaking into leaf, and so luminous and transparent was their opening foliage that they seemed to give forth light instead of shade.

Dobre had gone somewhat out of his usual course to lead the little girls to this spot.

"Nancy must pay a visit to our nuns," he had said. "She must enter the white convent walls, and step into the wondrously painted church where the ancient tombs lie in eternal sleep amid dust which the sun turns to gold."

But the flock had been left outside. It was not proper for the sheep to enter the holy inclosure.

Dobre, leading the way, passed under the vaulted passage of the belfry. The pair of heavy doors were wide open, as if they were two outstretched arms; they were heavy oaken doors, studded with huge rusty nails.

Underfoot were rounded cobblestones, with which the entire courtyard was paved. Nancy found them somewhat hard on her tired feet.

But what peace! White peace, indeed! Never had Nancy seen anything as white as that lovely building with its many columns—a double row of them, one above the other—forming a spacious square around the church. A bell was ringing, not insistently, but as a voice which was calling together those who, even without its reminding, would have come from long habit.

Nancy felt awed. Never before had she been in a place such as this. Her voice was suddenly hushed, and she stood still, staring about her.

"We must go into the church," said Dobre. "It is one of the most beautiful of our country. It is very, very old, and was built by one of our princes, who was very pious and who had many beautiful churches built in all parts of the country. You will see his portrait painted on the wall, when we enter."

Nancy listened attentively to all that her companion had to tell her. This was all very wonderful, indeed. She slipped her hand into Dobre's, and I believe that Dobre liked the feeling of that little hand in his. He had taken off his fur cap, and had stuck it under his armpit. Florica took Nancy's other hand. And it was thus that the three comrades passed under the columned and painted porch, into the dim sanctuary.

How lovely it was! So old, so mellow, so fairy-like! Such a mysterious light! And how quaint those paintings on the walls, and how graceful those silver lamps which, on their long chains,

seemed to have just emerged from the dark void above!

And there was a curious thing. The altar was hidden behind a high, shadowy, screen-like wall. It was entirely carved, and in it were three doors. Numberless icons were set into the old and intricate gilt carving. And quite at the top rose a large cross.

There was a curious odor about the church: a mixture of incense, and the smell of dust, and a faint scent of damp earth. It well suited the ancient, dusk-filled place. The more you looked at the walls, the more paintings did you see: just as, when you gaze at the night sky, the stars seem to multiply endlessly. The whole church was covered with paintings: up, up, until at the very top of the dome, an enormous Christ gazed at you with eyes which seemed to be of the size of small blue lakes.

"Now we must show her the princes," whispered Florica, dragging her friend back to the part of the church through which they had first come, which was the part farthest from the altar.

"Look!" she whispered.

And at these paintings Nancy gazed up in

wonder. Upon a background of dull gold stood famous kings of legend, watching the years roll by, their queens and their children, beside them.

"You see," whispered Florica, "they had many children: their daughters stand in a row on one side, their sons on the other. And all of them have crowns on their heads."

"They don't seem to enjoy their crowns," whispered Nancy.

"But they needn't," explained Florica. "They must be satisfied with the honor, you see."

"No, I don't see," murmured Nancy. "They don't look happy at all."

"But they need not be happy!" protested Florica.

"But why?" insisted Nancy.

"Because they are princes and princesses; that's enough."

"It isn't," firmly declared Nancy. "And why are the King and Queen holding a church in their hands?"

"That's because they built it."

"Well, it is all very strange and wonderful, and not at all as at home," sighed Nancy, as they emerged from the old church. "But I love the shuddery feeling that it gives me: it's like living

in a time with which you have nothing to do. But see how cheerful the sun is here, outside!"

And so it was! For after the dim church, the sunlight on the white outer walls was fairly glaring.

CHAPTER XVI

"We must inquire if the Staritza can see us," said Dobre.

"Who's the Staritza?" asked Nancy.

"She's the head nun—the one who keeps all the others in order."

"A sort of colonel of the regiment?"

"Well, yes," agreed Dobre, "but the nuns don't have such a jolly time as the soldiers in some regiments do!"

"They are very good women, and they pray day and night," explained Florica.

"And what else do they do?" asked the small American.

"Oh! But that's what they are there for: to say prayers and to lead holy lives," said Dobre.

"It doesn't sound very useful," declared Nancy.

"But, Dobre, they weave carpets, too, and they make jams. And sometimes they look after the poor children of the village—although they have

only done that lately, and only because our Metropolitan had new ideas," interposed Florica.

"The Metropolitan? Who's that? In New York it's the great Opera House!"

"Oh, no!" cried Florica, aghast. "Our Metropolitan is the man who is at the head of our whole church. He is a very holy man, with a long beard and the face of a saint. He lives at Bucharest, and sits in Parliament, and goes to see the King, and christens the royal children. Great honor is his!"

"Is he like the Pope?" asked Nancy. "But, no, he can't be, because popes have no beards."

"Our popes have!" protested Florica. "Big, big beards—the bigger the better!"

"But there is only one Pope," declared Nancy, with a most positive air.

"Not in Roumania, for we have one in every village!" insisted Florica.

"The one I mean lives in Rome, and has always lived in Rome. He's a Catholic, you know."

Florica shook her head. "I don't know anything about your Pope. But our popes have never

even visited Rome, and they keep pigs, just as we do. And almost all of them are as poor as we are."

"You'll have to show me one," declared Nancy, and her tone was doubtful.

"Come along, we'll just see the nuns quickly, for I cannot leave my sheep for such a long time," said Dobre, seizing Nancy by the hand. "Even if the Staritza can't receive us, we can go to one of the lesser nuns."

The three climbed one of the flights of stone stairs which led up to the second gallery. There were several of these flights of stone stairs, and where they joined the gallery it broadened out into a porch. Around the sides of this porch were wooden benches. These projecting porches—one or two of which had beautifully carved pillars—added much to the beauty of the convent.

As the children mounted the stone steps, an old nun, dressed entirely in black, leaned over the balustrade, and looked down at them.

"Where do you come from, little ones?" she asked, and her voice was friendly.

Dobre took off his cap. "We are going toward

the hills with my sheep," he said, "and this little girl is an American who has come across the great sea."

"Vai!" exclaimed the old nun, clasping her hands together. "Tell the dear little chicken to come up, and I'll get out the jars of sherbet. I think that the small American will enjoy sherbet and water."

"What kind of sherbet is it, if it comes out of jars?" whispered Nancy. "The only sherbet that I ever heard of was water-ice—and frozen."

"Wait and you'll see," whispered back Florica. "It's not frozen, but it's very good."

The nun was fat and friendly. She had red cheeks, and it would have been difficult to guess her age exactly. She wore a queer little black cap, which was wound around and kept in place by a stiff black veil, which passed under her chin. This arrangement was not very becoming to her. She did not at all resemble the Roman Catholic nuns whom Nancy had sometimes seen at home. But her appearance was less forbidding than theirs, and as she talked to the children, several

other nuns came out of their small cells to greet the visitors.

Their black garb was in strong contrast with the white of the walls, and they made an attractive picture, with that wonderful sunshine streaming down upon them as if it were liquid gold.

They chattered and laughed, using many quaint expressions, crossing themselves frequently, and often raising their clasped hands as if the habit of prayer was so much theirs, that they scarcely knew any other gesture.

They were a company of kindly, simple women, who should have been at the heads of homes. But, instead, each of them had sworn to live a life of self-denial. However, the life which they had chosen had not effaced the motherliness which is natural to every woman, and they were evidently delighted to devote themselves to the three way-weary wanderers.

And so the leading nun ushered Nancy and Florica and Dobre into the small vaulted cell of which she was mistress. How white and clean it was! What a delightful little room! Only it was

rather musty: evidently the nuns did not care much for fresh air!

There was a peculiar odor of old apples, dry herbs, washed linen and wood-smoke, and also a vague remembrance of onions.

Nancy sniffed. She had never met that sort of atmosphere before. She concluded that it was a convent atmosphere—which is exactly what it was!

With much fussy friendliness, the nuns installed the three companions around a table. The center of this table was decorated by a nest of red knitted wool, in which a trio of yellow alabaster eggs lay comfortably bedded.

Maica Fevronia, who was the chief hostess, opened a little old cupboard, and brought out two fat earthenware jars. One was green, and the other brown, and the top of each was tied up with paper and string. The paper duly removed, the old nun began scooping out great spoonfuls of the most delicious, sticky-looking stuff. It was more like cold-cream than anything else, Nancy thought, except that out of the green pot came

mauve cold-cream, and out of the brown one came pink!

"This is 'sherbet' of roses," said Maica Fevronia, with an important air, as she ladled out the pink cold-cream.

"And this," said Maica Eviokia, one of the other nuns, "is sherbet of bitter cherries. No one makes sherbet better than Maica Fevronia!"

Maica Fevronia nodded complacently. "Eat, my little chickens," she said. "And may the Mother of God bless your appetite!" And she crossed herself.

From one corner of the cell an ancient, half-effaced icon of the Holy Virgin was indeed smiling down upon the friendly company. A ray of light struck a corner of its old, golden background, and made it shine as if it were a light.

The Virgin's face was pear-shaped, her eyes were uncomfortably large and staring, and the Child whom she clasped in her arms had the same eyes as His Mother. Both seemed to belong to a dim and dwindling past which was only half remembered. Their heads were circled with halos

of embossed silver, and beneath the picture hung a wee silver lamp. Behind the image, a withered spray of basil-flower had been thrust by pious hands. That time-effaced icon and its small filigree lamp, were the only precious objects among many inartistic things.

I do not think that little Nancy realized the beauty of that primitive old painting. But the mystery of it attracted her, for while she was consuming her delicious pink jam, her eyes kept turning irresistibly toward it.

Everything else in Maica Fevronia's cell was comfortably ugly and of the glass-beaded, knitted type, so dear to the Early Victorians.

The holy women stood about the table like so many dark-plumed birds. They chattered and nodded and sighed. Nun-wise, they concealed their hands in their wide sleeves.

Nancy loved the sticky jam. How delicious it was! And how different from any American jam! And because it was so oversweet, large tumblers of water were offered after it as refreshment. The water was not as clear nor as cold as the water

which Nancy was accustomed to drink at home, but this disturbed her not at all.

As she rose from her seat, her eye was attracted by a large cake of bright pink soap lying upon the chest of drawers, like a huge polished gem.

"Oh!" she cried, almost in spite of herself, while her eyes sparkled as if she had discovered a wonderful treasure. Instinctively her hands moved toward the soap, and lifting it to her face, she rubbed her snub-nose lovingly against it.

"The little chicken admires my soap, does she? It came all the way from Bucharest. Mitru, my nephew, sent it to me. Would the little chicken like to have it? Take it, *draga*.* I only put it there as an ornament; it was much too lovely to use!"

Nancy was overwhelmed with her luck. A piece of soap! But she certainly would not keep it as a pink treasure which was too lovely to use!

Blushing, she thanked the kindly nun. And, feeling almost like a thief, she quickly dropped the soap into her pocket.

* Roumanian for "dearie."

"Come along, now, and pay your respects to the Maica Staritza. And you must see what handsome carpets we make!"

The carpets were bright-hued, with quaint, stiff designs. Nuns were working them on large wooden looms, and the wool lay piled up beside them in heaps of different colors. On each loom the shuttle flew backward and forward through the stretched threads, as if it were a dwarf-boat gone crazy. And these shuttles made a curious little noise which sounded through the otherwise silent room.

The carpets were certainly crude, but the brightness of their tints made them gay as a peasant garden in early autumn.

As for the Maica Staritza, she was really an imposing figure. Very tall and lean, draped in inky black, she sat in a stiff arm-chair in a room whose walls were hung with carpets and upon whose floors still more carpets were spread. It was quite a carpet exhibition, was that room of Maica Staritza's!

She was very old. Her eyes were dim and rather

veiled, and her trembling hands played with a long rosary of bright yellow amber beads, threaded on a black cord which ended in a tassel. The beads made a faint clicking sound as she slipped them through her fingers. She blessed the children by making the sign of the Cross on their foreheads. And when, much awed, they took leave of her, she came out on the gallery to watch their departure, helping herself along with a tall staff, which was topped by a beautiful old silver knob. This stick she carried with her right hand, while one of the nuns supported her at her left.

Nancy had become speechless. That imposing old woman in her black gown and veil really did not belong to the everyday world. She belonged to dim, olden times, in which America had never shared.

Looking back, Nancy saw the austere black figure framed between two white columns, where she stood very upright in spite of her age. With the young nun supporting her elbow, it might well have been a picture from an old story-book.

Nancy heaved a deep sigh as they passed under

the domed belfry and on into the outer courtyard.

"I think that I've been dreaming," she exclaimed.

"It's a very holy place," said Florica, crossing herself.

Dobre stretched out his hand and clasped Nancy's in his. And off they started again, with the flock ambling before them—off, along the endless, dusty roads. . . .

CHAPTER XVII

But our Nancy was yet to have many another thrill.

Their road was now leading them through a series of mountain villages.

Here the houses were larger than those of the plains. Their roofs were of wooden shingles as gray as ashes, half hidden amongst clouds of blossoms. For every fruit-tree was abloom.

Many of these houses had wooden galleries or overhanging porches which projected from their second stories, and on which women with motherly faces shielded their eyes with their hands against the glare of the sun, in order that they might watch the children pass.

The air was resonant with the songs of birds that were building their nests. And above all arched a blue sky, transparent, entrancing—verily a fit mansion whence God could smile down upon Earth.

Dobre held Nancy by the hand most of the time, except when he was playing on his flute. And when he played, Nancy's feet knew no weariness.

Here in Roumania contrasts were very great. When they had been on the plains, it seemed to Nancy that no other country could be as flat as this one. And now, when they were in the hills, it seemed to her that the country was a particularly hilly one.

The air was as strong as good wine, and although their road was becoming steeper, her feet seemed to have wings.

But the nights were chilly, and Nancy would certainly have suffered, had not faithful Dobre built huge fires to keep "the little stranger" warm.

Dobre's kindness to her was unfailing. And day by day Nancy's child-heart loved him more and more fervently. In fact she was almost losing her desire to meet the Haiduc in her growing affection for Dobre.

One evening, while crossing a valley, they came upon a gypsy camp. That, to Nancy, was a great event.

The wandering folk had pitched their tents in a grove of elder-trees, close to a bubbling stream which was noisy with the rush of melted snows, and the edges of which were yellow with marsh marigolds.

Dobre shared the usual peasant-suspicion of the gypsies. They were, according to him, a lying, stealing, not-to-be-trusted race of vagabonds. They were, he thought, better kept at arm's length—in fact, they were only to be tolerated because of their music.

"They are good for only three uses," declared the youth. "They are helpful as extra hands when you are building a house or reaping a field, they are efficient tinkers, and they are incomparable musicians. And no village *hora* * nor any harvest feast is complete without the gypsy *lautar*."

Dobre would have preferred camping anywhere else, rather than in the company of the gypsies. But as night was coming on, and they were tired from a long day's tramp, they dared not start upon the next steep climb.

* The national dance of Roumania.

Thus did Nancy come into real contact with that mysterious race, which has no rest in its blood—which wanders endlessly over the wide world's ways.

What a noisy company that was! How the dark people chattered, laughed, and quarreled! And how picturesque they were! Old tattered crones, veritable witches, with sunken eyes which seemed to stare into the past—or into the future! And beside them, old men with heads of apostles!

The young men were so handsome that it was almost uncanny. Their eyes glowed, and each of them had black, matted hair hanging down on both sides of his face, resembling the ears of a black spaniel.

As to the young girls—some of them were true beauties. Their bearing was impudent, but there was something magnificent in the manner in which they carried their rags. For although their clothes were nothing but cast-off remnants of peasant embroideries, upon these dusky-faced maidens they became almost regal.

Many a one of them had the air of a beggared

queen. When they moved and gesticulated, the yellow coins which were plaited into their raven tresses, flashed as if they were drops of light.

But above all there were children—seemingly by the hundred! Half-naked, noisy, shrieking, quarreling children everywhere! And moving in and out among them, lean and half-starved dogs, who prodded, snuffling, about the refuse.

There were also several mangy donkeys, who looked both patient and wise. Except for the fact that, from time to time, they flapped their long ears, they appeared to be indifferent to all of the noise and fuss which was going on around them. They seemed superior to everything—even to time and to fatigue.

Tremendously interested, but not a little awed, was our Nancy. The dark folk crowded around her, touched her hair, fingered her dress, nudged her elbows, thrust their none-too-clean fingers into her face. Never had she seen so many hands, and every hand seemed claiming something, as if they were so accustomed to begging that they could make only begging gestures: just as, when the

nuns made gestures, they had instinctively made those of prayer.

Nancy might almost have thought herself among savages. Dobre, noticing her nervousness, kept close at her side, while Florica quietly moved about among the gypsies, her small peasant dignity contrasting strangely with their noise and excitement.

But the gypsies were perfectly good-natured and friendly. They were quite ready to share their fires, and even their tents. But nothing would have induced the little American to enter such a tent. Ugh! What filth!

Night came down, and with it came some calm. The air was chilly, and every one crowded around the fires, which fantastically illumined the landscape, making a weird setting for the elder-grove by the streamlet.

The three companions had thrown themselves down by the largest fires, for Nancy was shivering.

"Come, little stranger," said Dobre. "I'll put my arm around you, and you shall share my coat."

So Nancy cuddled up beside Florica's older

brother, her head against his rough shirt, which Baba Zoë had spun with her old, old hands. Florica was close beside Dobre on the other side.

Nancy felt deliciously safe and warm, thus sheltered from the cold as well as from any disagreeable familiarity on the part of their hosts. She watched the flame-lit scene with eyes become rather heavy with sleep. As she peeped out at it, it seemed more than ever that it was all a dream.

Next to Nancy, sat a very, very old hag, beside whom squatted a coal-eyed youth, with a handsome, watchful face. The old hag was mumbling to herself, and two nearly naked children lay with their heads in her lap.

Suddenly the black-eyed youth sprang to his feet, and Nancy saw that he had a violin in his hand. Setting it beneath his chin he began to play. Ah! how he played!

There was the whole grief of the world in his weeping music—grief, but also mocking peals of laughter, and a mad dance-rhythm, which would suddenly merge into tunes as solemn as dirges for the dead! Then again, strains which suggested

"AH! HOW HE PLAYED!"

prayers—insistent, ardent prayers, which were half pagan—would wail up to the skies! And those, in turn, would become soft love whisperings, which surely could have melted even the stoniest heart!

Weird and wonderful indeed was that music, played by one of Nature's own musicians, into the darkness of God's night!

To that dark fellow standing there, a fantastic figure in the light of the flames, music came as naturally as it comes to the nightingale, or to the waters, or to the wind.

Fascinated, Nancy stared at that picture, which seemed like a stage setting. The dark folk had all crowded around this one fire to listen to Mirko's music. Their dusky, Indian-like faces were illumined by the dancing spurts of light, which—suddenly dying down—would sometimes change these human beings into mere shadows which were but little darker than the night.

Nancy's lids were gradually closing over her eyes. She opened them once or twice, and stared like an owl, winking stiffly.

The sound of the rushing stream was an accompaniment to the violin's sobbing. At times Mirko's music was louder than the throbbing of the water; at others, the stream was the louder of the two. Finally both seemed to flow into each other, softly, darkly . . . as might the fluttering of wings!

Bending down, Dobre looked into Nancy's face. Yes, the little stranger was sleeping. As a small bird under its mother's wing, she was sleeping.

In the huge mystery of the night, the three comrades made a touching picture.

East and West had met!

CHAPTER XVIII

Some one was singing.

Sleepy, Nancy sat up and rubbed her eyes. She was very stiff but quite warm—Dobre and his sheepskin coat had kept off the chill of the night. She stretched out her hand—the ground was wet with dew.

Some one was singing.

"Flames of the sun,
Flames of the fire:
Burn up my heart!
Burn my desire!"

"Dobre!"

The boy moved.

"Dobre!"

"Yes, little stranger?"

"Dobre, who is singing?"

"The sun is rising," said Dobre, and he yawned. And then again that song:

"I'm heartless now,
I'm lawless—free!
No grief, nor love,
Nor chains for me!

"Death is a farce;
Eternity
(An endless road)
Is old to me!"

The sun was filtering palely through the trees. The busy streamlet was even noisier than last night, while countless birds gladdened the morning with their joyous trills. But that young, rather tragic voice was loudest of all; it rang with a strange defiance that seemed out of keeping with the morning brightness.

"Why is he angry?" whispered Nancy, pointing to the young gypsy whose voice tore the morning with such harsh complaint.

"The gypsies are always full of passion," explained Dobre, rising to his feet, and stretching out his arms as if he would embrace the whole world. "They are dark people, uneasy and mysterious. A curse lies upon them, for nowhere can they rest."

"I am sorry for them," declared Nancy.

"Sorry?" Dobre did not seem to understand. "Why sorry?"

"But if they are homeless?" explained Nancy.

"They are thieves," pronounced Dobre.

"You seem to hate them; do you, Dobre?"

"Do I hate them? Well, little stranger, I've never thought about it. Their ways are not our ways."

"It is time to leave," said Florica. "We have a long road to travel if we want to reach Matusa Daria's house before dark."

So, after a scanty breakfast of *mamaliga,* shared with the wandering people, the three companions started off again on their upward road. As they departed, Nancy still heard the sobbing strains of a violin and snatches of song.

"Hearts that I've broken,
Dreams that I've torn,
Let the world's heartless
Shroud you in scorn!

"Ever I'll travel,
As aliens must,
Driven and homeless,
Long roads of dust!"

That was a long road which the three companions traveled that day, and yet they did not reach Matusa Daria's house, but had to sleep another night under the stars. The stars were beautiful, but owing to the mountain air the night was very cold, and more than once Nancy gave a longing thought to her little white bed under the snug green roof of Granny's house. Once, even, Dobre heard something like a muffled sob, and drew his sheepskin more closely around his precious charges. But morning was so beautiful that all the homesickness was forgotten. And just before sunset the children reached a high point whence

there was a marvelous view over the hills toward the plains.

Here they rested, and Nancy, seated on a heap of stones, folded her hands in ecstasy; almost solemn did she feel, so astoundingly beautiful, so world-wide and glorious was that view.

"And that stone building, like a wee fairy-castle over there on a rock—what is it?" asked she, pointing with her finger.

"That is the Queen's Castle," said Dobre.

"A real queen?"

"Our Queen!"

"She lives there?"

"Sometimes," said Florica, "when she wants to rest."

"Is she resting now?"

"Let me see if a flag is waving from the highest tower," said Dobre. "That's the sign that she's there."

"Oh! I do hope that she's there!"

Nancy almost gasped. This was more and more like a fairy-story; Florica's and Dobre's Queen! That was almost too good to be true!

"It is too far, I cannot see whether there is a flag there or not. Let us hurry down. When we are nearer, we shall see if there is."

And hurry they did. Even the sheep tripped along more briskly, as if even they felt excited.

What a beautiful descent that was! At each turn the view was different, and each view seemed more marvelous than the last. There were deep green valleys with almost virgin forest tumbling down into them—stupendous beech woods which were bursting into leaf; and further back, ink-black spruce, like armies standing on guard, protecting the rocky mountains beyond. How impressive it was!

"Will she have her crown on?"

"Are you still thinking of the Queen?" asked Dobre.

Nancy nodded.

"When she is here, the Queen usually wears a simple dress like ours," explained Florica, "but because she is married and has many children, she wears a white veil instead of a colored handkerchief."

"I thought that she would wear a crown," said Nancy. There was disappointment in her voice.

"But a crown is heavy," said Florica wisely.

"How can she look like a queen without a crown?" insisted the little American.

"A white veil looks almost like a crown," said Dobre.

"Is she fond of her people?"

"Yes," pronounced the shepherd, almost solemnly. "She cared for our wounded during the war, and fed the hungry children, and went into the widows' huts."

"Is she beautiful?" asked Nancy, gazing up into the peasant's face.

"Her eyes have wept as have the eyes of our mothers," said Florica. "They say that she, too, laid a little son to rest under the ground, and that she had to leave him alone in the old church, because the enemy came and drove her and the King out from their royal palace. They also drove out all of the royal children—except the baby Prince, who lay sleeping in the church, keeping vigil until their return."

"Then perhaps she is too old to be beautiful?" And now there was anxiety in Nancy's voice.

"They say," explained Florica, "that when she came into the country, she was fair as are the ripe cornfields, and that her eyes were blue, and that she was as lovely as Ileanna Cosinzeana of our fairy-tales. But she was a stranger then."

"But now she is no longer a stranger?"

"No," said Dobre, "she has cried with us and she has laughed with us; she has sung our songs and broken our bread. She has sat before our hearths and held our little ones in her arms. And the poorest come up to her castle, and never does she send them away."

"And the King?"

"He drew his sword to liberate our people, so that all of us within our frontier should be brothers once more. He is brave and good, and he always thinks of us before he thinks of himself."

"How do you know all that?" asked the little stranger.

"We all know it," said Dobre. And as if some

one higher than he were present, he took his cap from his head.

"They've lived for us," said Dobre, and his sister nodded her head.

"I hope that the Queen will be there!" cried Nancy, clasping her hands.

"See, there's the flag!" cried Florica. "Red with the orange eagle upon it, and with a blue border."

"Let's hurry!" begged Nancy.

And off they started again, down, down the steep descent, as fast as their feet could carry them. Once Nancy exclaimed, seizing Florica's hand:

"To think that you were a doll in a shop and that Granny bought you!"

"And now perhaps I'll show you a real, live queen," laughed the little peasant.

"It sounds like a story-book," said Nancy.

CHAPTER XIX

Matusa Daria's cottage lay a little above the highroad on a green meadow, and was surrounded by huge apple-trees in full bloom. It was certainly a more prosperous dwelling than Baba Zoë's hut. It had actually two stories and a small wooden gallery which was reached by half a dozen wooden steps.

But what made it wonderful was, that from its wee windows you could see the Queen's Castle, as if it were a beautiful picture painted against the sky.

"It's like the fortresses in my Book of Legends!" cried Nancy.

"It was a fortress," explained Matusa Daria. "They say some Teuton knights built it long ago to protect this valley against the Turks."

"The Turks?" Nancy looked bewildered.

"We were always trying to protect ourselves against the Turks," explained Dobre, somewhat vaguely.

"And against other enemies also," added Daria.

"We always had enemies on every side and we were continually invaded. Roumania is a land of tears."

"Very lately we were invaded from three sides. My father died during the last invasion; Mother died soon after, and left the twins."

"She left you also," sighed Matusa Daria. "Many wee children were left, but most of them died."

"The twins were the smallest," murmured Florica, who probably had a motherly feeling toward her younger brother and sister, because peasant girls are motherly at an early age, in that land near the Rising Sun. Work begins early, and even childhood is not free from toil—the toil of those who till the land.

"Do you know," said Nancy quaintly, turning toward Florica's aunt, "Florica was a doll in America, and she magicked me over to Roumania. And now, out of your windows I can see the Queen's Castle."

"Vai!" exclaimed Daria, who was a comfortable, motherly person, without much imagination. She had always been the prosperous member of an otherwise poor family; but there was no pride in her on that account; she was all kindness and hospitality.

"Vai, Vai! But it's a real fairy-story! And who would have imagined that Florica would be

as clever as all that—our Florica! And all the way from America! *Vai, Vai!* How did you do it, Florica? And how did you get over to America, and as a doll into the bargain? God Almighty, protect us!" And the good woman crossed herself several times.

"Yes, and see my shoes—they are beginning to wear out because we've walked so far," continued practical Nancy, "and please, may I have some hot water? I haven't had a bath for a long time, and the nuns gave me a piece of soap."

"From Bucharest," added Florica; but she gave no explanation of the way in which she had done her great trick.

"A bath!" exclaimed the peasant woman. "Does the little chicken want to get right into the water?"

"Yes, if you please," insisted the little American. Decidedly she was destined to be called "little chicken" by all these kindly people; *Puiule* was the word they really used. "I'd like to get right in it and I'd like it to be hot, because that takes the dirt off better, Granny always said."

"Did she? Your old granny in America, I suppose? But here, wouldn't the river do?"

"No, please!" Nancy was quite positive. "I've had rivers and streams all along the road, and mighty chilly they were, too! But if you don't mind, to-day I'd like a real bath."

"Listen to the child!" exclaimed the peasant woman. "To-day if you don't mind, I'd like a real bath! And she all the way from America and after so much travel that her shoes are nearly worn out! I'm beginning to wonder if my head is screwed on the right way. A bath! That reminds me of a story that an old nun told me. She came from our mountain convent, and slept a night in my house.

"She says that the Queen, who was then a young princess, had once spent a few days at their convent—such an honor! But just think! Every day she wanted a bath! And of course there was no bathtub—nothing which she could use except the wooden tub in which the nuns washed their linen. So that had to do, and from all sides the nuns carried hot water, which they heated on their little

"'IF I VISIT THE QUEEN TO-MORROW, I MUST BE CLEAN.'"

stoves for the Princess' bath. But they brought such boiling water—to make sure that it would really be a hot bath—that when it was ready, the Princess could not get into it!" And old Daria laughed, holding her sides. And the three children laughed with her, while a little star peeped in at the window to see what the joke was. For evening had come suddenly, and the Queen's Castle was now but a shadow against the darkening sky.

"But the little chicken shall have her bath! I, too, have a tub, in which I do my washing. It's in the shed—but that will be all right, I suppose. And I'll see that you are not scalded as the poor Princess was."

"Yes, you see, if I visit the Queen to-morrow, I must be as clean as I am when I am in America," explained Nancy. "She would get a wrong idea of little American girls if I had not had a bath. Granny would feel very badly about it, and so would black Sue. And the Queen . . ."

Up went Daria's hands again. "The Queen! And she talks quietly of visiting the Queen in her

castle—as if everybody could go up and knock at the Queen's door, and ask to come in! And she, poor dear, there for a rest. And sometimes, they say, she wants to be alone; for she loves her gardens and her plants. She has such beautiful flowers that when we pass them we cross ourselves, because the colors are like those in Paradise."

Daria's words came rushing out in a torrent; she was quite shocked that any one could talk so lightly of seeing the Queen.

"But she is our Mother," said Florica simply. "She is our Mother."

"That's true! May the Holy Virgin give her many days." And old Daria crossed herself again.

"And I know that she's fond of Americans," added Nancy. "So I'm sure that when she hears that there is a little American girl here, she'll let me come to see her. Yes, I'm sure of that! But please, may I have my bath now?"

"You know," related Daria, ignoring for the moment Nancy's insistence upon her bath, "before the Queen came here, the castle was a melancholy, forsaken place—a dead thing. Then after the war,

the people gave it to the Queen, because they love her. And the Queen made the ancient little fortress wake up and live. It was as if it were a blind thing opening its eyes to see. And our village blesses her. We used to be on enemy's ground; but since the war, we belong again to the Old Country and the Queen's little castle is like a symbol; it was a new and blessed awakening in every way."

"Does she love her castle?" inquired Nancy.

"She does! She's given it a soul, so of course she loves it. And we are happy when we see the flag being hoisted—and look! There is the first light beginning to shine."

Nancy, her face close to that of the peasant woman, peeped through the small window at the now shadowy castle, and truly there was something like an eye of light looking down upon them.

"Oh, please, I must have a hot bath!" urged Nancy again, "I must be as clean as Granny would like me to be, when I go up there!"

"Well, well! You know what you want at any rate, little chicken, so let's heat the water. But

you, Dobre, must go and fetch it up from the river. And I suppose you are hungry, too?"

So Nancy had a bath in Matusa Daria's wash-tub. The water was delightfully hot, although it was not scalding, as the Princess' bath in the convent had been.

The nun's beautiful piece of soap proved a great blessing, although more for show than for use, and with the help of the hot water Nancy made it do wonders. Florica looked on with her large peasant eyes which never showed any astonishment; but when she was invited to take part in the little American's bath, she slipped off her clothes, stepped without ado into the steaming tub and seated herself beside her traveling companion.

"Do you think that she will receive us to-morrow?" asked Nancy.

"Who? The Queen?"

"Yes!"

"I hope that she will," said Florica.

"Shall we tell her that you were a doll?" asked Nancy.

"She believes in fairy-stories, I know," said

Florica with a wise nod of her head, "so I think that we can tell her."

"Here, let me soap your back," proposed Nancy, "because we must be clean!"

So it was that two well-scrubbed little girls went to sleep side by side that night under Matusa Daria's roof.

Once Nancy awoke, and giving her bed-fellow a little nudge, asked in a sleepy voice: "Do you think that she has ever met Haiduc?"

"Who?"

Florica's voice was heavy with sleep.

"The Queen," murmured Nancy.

But Florica merely said "Huh!" and turned over on her side.

Beyond, on the high rock, stood the small castle, its light looking down as if it were a giant star upon the village beneath—or as if it were a beacon towering aloft to guide any wanderer who might pass that way.

CHAPTER XX

What an awakening that was for Nancy!

The sun peeped into the cottage. The children were still fast asleep—it was many a day since they had slept under a roof. But the sun had no intention of being ignored. He lengthened his rays as if they were search-lights, and played them about over the wooden bed in which the two girls slept, closely cuddled one against the other. Finally the beams were so warm on Nancy's face that she sat up and rubbed her eyes, yawned, winked several times, yawned again, and then gave a sudden exclamation:

"Oh! The Queen!"

"What?" murmured Florica.

"But it's to-day that we'll see her!"

Florica opened large eyes, and a slow smile came to her lips.

"And over in America I was a doll," was what she said.

Nancy passed her hands over her hair.

"I'm afraid it's grown awfully long!" she said anxiously.

"What's grown long?"

"My hair's grown long—I feel it. But do get up quickly, Florica."

"It has dear little curly ends, your hair. I am sure that the Queen will like its honey color!"

"Do you think that she will?" Nancy's voice was eager, excited.

"Yes, she'll like it," declared the peasant child with conviction.

About an hour later the three traveling companions were climbing up the steep path leading to the castle. Up, up—and still up; it was like climbing toward an eagle's nest. What wonderful places men of olden times chose on which to build!

Nancy was rather out of breath. Besides, excitement and other emotions almost choked her.

"Suppose she won't let us come in?"

"She is our Mother," pronounced Florica, with the simplicity of perfect faith.

Florica and Dobre were quite calm, but there was an expression on their faces which they might

have worn if they had been going to church. Matusa Daria had seen to it that Dobre had on a spotlessly clean shirt. He had laid off his heavy sheepskin coat, and he looked tall and slim—all in white, with the high fur bonnet on his head.

"There's an old white-haired man, it seems, who guards the door. He's a sort of wizard who helped the Queen to make the castle come to life. They told me about him yesterday in the village—because I did not go to bed as early as you two did. But he has a kind heart, they say! And he tells the Queen which peasants are the poorest. He stays there when the Queen is away and looks after the place."

Dobre paused for a moment, and took off his bonnet.

"We're nearly there!" he said.

A steep flight of stone steps—hundreds of them! And at the top, a door of oak, with an iron hinge, was framed in rough stone. That was the front door. In fact the castle had only one door, because it was a fortress, built hundreds of years ago to defend the village.

But despite these ancient precautions against intruders, the children mounted the long stone stairs without delay, for there was no one there to prevent them. Finally they reached the closed door.

A statue of the Virgin, carved in stone, stood above it, against the wall. She held the Christ child in her arms, but her eyes were gazing far over the valley.

"You must knock!" whispered Florica.

Dobre raised the heavy bronze knocker and knocked once, twice, thrice!

At first there was no sound.

The children waited, holding their breaths. Their hearts were pounding like hammers.

Ah! Some one was coming!

The door opened slowly; it was very heavy. A door such as this could only open slowly.

A white head, a kindly face!

"Children!"

The old man smiled.

Dobre looking up from the step where he stood, twisting his *caciula* bonnet shyly back-

ward and forward between his fingers, said:

"This is a little foreigner and she'd like to see the Queen."

"I've come all the way from America with Florica, who was a Roumanian doll," explained Nancy. "And in America we, too, know of your Queen—"

"Well, this is interesting!" exclaimed the old man. "I must go and call the Princess."

"He's going to call the Princess," whispered Nancy in an awed voice. "So there's also a Princess!"

"Yes, yes; she's the Queen's daughter. And she's very fond of small children. And she can ride like the Haiduc!"

"Oh!" exclaimed the little American. "I can't wait to see her!"

A light step—and a bright voice, young and happy, called out:

"Where are they?"

And there stood a real princess!

The sun shone on her, and her eyes were large and dark violet, her teeth very white. She was

dressed as the peasants dress on Sundays and feast-days. Her shirt was heavy with embroidery; her pleated red skirt had a silver border. She wore a dark orange scarf on her head, and a scarlet geranium over one ear.

She was lovely!

"Come in!" she cried. "Mother is up stairs; I'll call her. She'll be so interested when she hears that there's a small American girl here. We loved America—but how far away it is! Aren't you tired? What's your name?"

"Nancy! And these are Florica and Dobre. Florica was a doll, but she brought me here."

The Princess clapped her hands.

"You must tell that to Mother! She is fond of fairy-stories. Nancy! such a darling name. And Florica and Dobre!"

The Princess turned to the little peasants and stretched out both of her hands—which they kissed.

"You're a *cioban,* Dobre! Where have you left your sheep?"

"At Matusa Daria's," explained Dobre.

"Ah! That's the dear little house on the hill with the large apple-trees, I know. But now you must follow me up to Mother."

Fleet-footed as a deer, the Princess turned and, hurrying on before them, led the three wanderers into a marvelous, fairylike little courtyard, which was one blaze of sunlight and of red geraniums. At least, that was how it appeared at first sight to Nancy. It was the most wonderful little courtyard the child had ever seen!

Imagine a small square inclosure, shut in by high fortress walls as thick as six ordinary walls! On the outer side were loopholes—small, unglassed windows, hewn out through the deep walls. Through these you could look out over the valley below, where a slender river flowed along beneath shady trees. But the river was so far, far down that it seemed to be a silver ribbon of several shades. One part of the courtyard was higher than the rest, and this was walled off into a wee garden which was gay with flowers—red, violet and orange!

Looking up, Nancy saw a medley of towers,

galleries, windows, piled up one above the other. No two of the windows had the same shape—and such ducky little windows they were! Just the sort for bewitched princesses, hobgoblins, or wizards to peep out of. Scarlet and fire-colored flowers hung in bright cascades from every window and gallery, and so warmly did the sun stream down upon them that they seemed to glow like fire!

Chimneys of different sizes grew out of the brownish red tiles of the roof, and from one of these a wisp of smoke curled up toward the blue sky, as if it were a swirl of mist which the morning had forgotten to call away.

Oh, indeed, indeed, it was an enchanted castle! Nancy had to rub her eyes and pinch her arms to make sure that it was not all a dream, that she was truly here, that she had spoken to a real princess, and that the crooked little flight of steps before her actually led up to the part of the castle in which the Queen lived. Not a queen in a fairy-story, but a real queen of flesh and blood, whom the peasants so quaintly called "Our Mother."

CHAPTER XXI

The Princess had disappeared up the crooked little stairs.

How quickly she moved! Her feet seemed to have wings. And the little stairs were just the sort of stairs to lead one into fairyland.

But here was the Princess again! What lovely eyes she had, like great dark violet flowers! And when she ran, the silver border of her skirt glittered like star dust.

"Come," she cried gladly, "Mother's thrilled that a small American girl has found her way up to her castle. She's waiting in her room."

And so, with beating heart, Nancy mounted those stairs, her hand firmly clasped in that of the Princess. Dobre and Florica followed close on their heels.

On the staircase was a blue carpet with quaint designs of brown, black and green. And when they reached the top, there was a tiny door, so low

that the Princess, who was tall, had to bend her head.

Through this door they entered a small entrance hall. Such a quaint little place it was! All white, with vaulted ceiling and with wee windows set in incredibly thick walls! And everywhere, sunshine and flowers!

Never had Nancy dreamed that there could be so many flowers. They stood in great jars on the old carved chests and tables, on the window-sills, on the floor; they even shone from shiny copper vessels which hung by old chains from the ceiling. There were irises, tulips, lilacs, apple-blossoms and all sorts of flowering branches. The air was sweet with their fragrance, and the sun, streaming in through the windows, made their colors blaze.

Underfoot, mellow-tinted rugs of many shades spread over a dark floor. Queer, solemn-faced saints peeped down upon you from gilded backgrounds. They seemed curiously at home, on those plain white walls.

Certainly this was not Nancy's idea of a royal palace, but it was ever so much pleasanter and

more homelike—although it was entirely different from anything which she had ever seen before.

She had imagined a palace full of golden chairs, gorgeous silk hangings, and portraits of ancestors in heavily carved frames—and, everywhere, tall footmen in bright liveries.

But this was an enchanted little castle, guarded by an old wizard with white hair—a flowery retreat to which a queen came to rest.

"Here they are, Mother!" cried the Princess. "Look at her! Isn't she darling—and she's called Nancy!"

And there, by a plain white hearth, stood the Queen. A bright woodfire was burning behind her, casting over her a radiant glow. Was she old or young? Plain or beautiful? These questions seemed all at once to have no importance. What Nancy saw was a smile of welcome and a pair of blue eyes which were kind, although strangely sad.

"Nancy!"

It was a mother's voice. The Queen bent down and kissed the little American stranger, and she also kissed Dobre and Florica—although Dobre

was a real boy! But as Nancy looked at the Queen, it seemed quite natural that she should kiss Dobre. For was she not "their Mother," as they themselves had proclaimed?

Her hands, too, were a mother's hands. Nancy had never known her own mother, but when the Queen passed her hands over her head, gently but firmly, Nancy knew that this was done as her own mother would have done it.

"So you are called Nancy! Let me look at you! You know, I am fond of Americans, large and small. In some way, I believe that we've always understood each other. And these are Florica and Dobre, your companions? You have a frank, affectionate face, Nancy. And I'm pleased that you have made friends with my little Roumanians. I always want all people of all countries to be friends!"

"And, Mother," exclaimed the Princess, "imagine, Florica came to America as a doll! It was Florica who managed to bring Nancy here!"

"That's a real fairy-story," said the Queen. "Tell me about it, Nancy."

The Queen seated herself in a large arm-chair near the blazing hearth, and Nancy found herself on a low stool at her feet, with her hand in that of the Queen.

For some reason she did not feel shy. The Queen's eyes and smile made her feel quite at home.

She was dressed very much as was the Princess

—whom she called Ileana—but on her head was a long white veil, as white as the walls of her room.

Here also, the ceiling was vaulted, and there were even more flowers than in the little reception hall outside—especially yellow, heliotrope and bronze-colored tulips. And there was one huge old silver jar, full of white, gray and lavender tinted irises. On the window-sill stood a peasant's jug, full of apple-blossom branches which were of the delicate color of snow when the dawn paints it pink!

There was peace in this small white room, and the song of many birds in the trees made fitting music for it—as if they were a soft accompaniment which you dreamed of, rather than heard.

The floor had been stained black. Yellow rugs, blue-bordered, were spread over it. There were touches of yellow about the cushions, curtains and chairs. Over the couch, hung three old silver church-lamps filled with white flowers which took the place of the lights. Their shadows on the white walls took queer shapes.

A dream-room in a dream-castle! And there sat

Nancy, the little American girl, her hand quite at home in that of the Queen, who listened to her as she told of Granny, and of old Sue, and of the Roumanian doll which had come to life and conjured her across the sea. . . .

CHAPTER XXII

"And your poor old granny—isn't she very lonely and sad?" asked the Queen, when Nancy had finished her tale.

"Florica is so clever, and she promised to let Granny know that I am safe and sound," explained Nancy.

The Queen stretched out her hand to Florica, who shyly came nearer and kissed it.

"Are you a little witch, Florica?" she asked.

"I was sad in a foreign country," murmured Florica. "I could not remain a doll; so I brought Nancy over here to see our beloved country. For I love her, and since I had to come back, I wanted her to come with me."

"You were too full of *dor* to remain in a foreign land, weren't you, Florica?"

"Yes," said Florica, with her eyes on the ground.

"And do you know, Nancy, when I first came here from England, I was very young and I, too,

was full of *dor* for the country which I had left? But now I belong to this country, because I have shared all of its joys and sorrows."

Nancy did not quite understand, but she liked to hear the Queen.

"Don't you have any *dor* for England now?" she asked.

"Yes, sometimes," said the Queen, "but I have learned this, little Nancy: all lands and all people are lovable if we know them well enough. Our hearts are where our work is. 'That which thy hand findeth to do, do with all thy might.' I tried to live up to that ideal, little Nancy."

"Did you like America?" asked the child.

"Ah, yes, I surely did, Nancy. But I was not there long enough! I did not see all of it—it's a world in itself! But I loved it, and your people were very kind."

"I have known how kind-hearted the Americans are, ever since the war. They helped us then, and even afterwards, with the sick and the wounded—and also with the hungry, orphaned children, of whom there were thousands and thousands! The

Americans are generous; their hearts are warm. Ileana also knows how good and kind they can be!"

"Indeed I do!" exclaimed the Princess. "Mother, Nicky and I want to go to America again!"

"Then will you go and see Granny and old black Sue?" pleaded Nancy.

"Of course we will!" declared Ileana. "And has your house perchance a green roof?"

"Yes, it has!" exclaimed Nancy, clapping her hands. "How did you guess?"

"Because I especially remember a wee cottage with a green roof, in America, which was so ducky that I would have liked to carry it off with me!"

"Perhaps it was Granny's house!"

"And if we had knocked at the door, would old black Sue have let us in?" teased the Princess.

"Of course!" declared Nancy.

At this everybody laughed, even Dobre and Florica—and they seldom laughed, they were such solemn little people.

"And when you go back again to America, you

must tell everybody about Roumania," said the Queen. "About our wonderful forests, rivers and plains, and about our peasants in their lovely costumes—our dear, patient, faithful peasants whose men were such good soldiers during the war. Don't you love their darling huts, Nancy—and their many songs?"

"Yes," nodded Nancy. "But I don't think that Granny would like me to sleep in the same bed with a pig!"

Again the Queen and the Princess laughed.

"I hope that it was a chestnut-colored pig?" said Ileana.

"With a coppery shine on its curls?" added the Queen.

"Yes, yes, it was!" assented Nancy.

"And you must see the Black Sea," declared the Queen. "Dobre, are you going to take our little stranger down to our seashore?"

"I hope to," said Dobre, "if her legs are not too short for such a long journey."

"Nancy must not imagine that we have no trains in Roumania!" said the Queen. "We are

not so efficient as you are in America, but it's only our dear *coibans* who always travel on foot!

"But if you've plenty of time to spare, wandering slowly—as the shepherds do—is a wonderful way to see the heart of the country.

"If you don't hurry, perhaps you'll find me near the Black Sea when you reach there. You must come and see my little white house at Balcic —when the lilies are in bloom."

"Do you also count the seasons by their flowers?" asked the little American.

The Queen laughed.

"It's a Roumanian custom which I've fallen into," she declared. "Besides, I'm such an ardent flower-lover that I plant gardens wherever I go, and the seasons become precious to me according to what flowers are in bloom. Ileana, you must show Nancy our gardens below the castle. The irises are lovely just now—seas of violet, yellow and blue."

"May I first ask you something?" said Nancy—as if most of her conversation had not been made up of questions.

"Anything you like," smiled the Queen.

"Do you ever wear a crown?"

Peals of laughter from the violet-eyed princess.

"You are disappointed not to see Mother in her crown? She is lovely in her crown, and on the day of Father's and Mother's coronation she wore such a wonderful robe of gold with a red shimmer woven in it! It seemed like dawn and sunset blended into one! And she wore a great mantle of the same shiny fabric. She really was a legendary queen on that day!"

The Queen's eyes had a far-away look.

"Yes," she said, "I suppose that one always thinks of a queen as having a crown on her head; and when one sees her so, one always thinks of the beauty of the crown, but never of its weight.

"A crown is a heavy thing, Nancy. It has become a symbol of servitude rather than one of glory."

"But I should like to see you in a robe of gold and a golden crown," said Nancy, not at all understanding what the Queen had meant.

Again the Princess laughed. "A queen's first duty is to be lovely, isn't it?"

"I could not imagine an ugly queen!" said Nancy.

"We are much simpler people than little Americans imagine," smiled the woman in the white veil. "Our joys and sorrows are much like your own. But we kings and queens have not only our own griefs to bear: we must bear the griefs of our people as well. And we always have anxiety about their welfare. That anxiety is sometimes heavy. So we need hearts which are large, patient and understanding—and they must be forgiving, too, Nancy, because sometimes we are cruelly misunderstood."

Nancy stared with wide open eyes.

"Are you sad?" she asked.

The Queen leaned down and kissed the little stranger.

"I try never to be sad," she said. "People need to be consoled, not to be saddened. My message must always be a message of hope. There is so much sadness in the world, so much poverty and

suffering, that when the people come to a queen, they must be met with smiles and not tears, brave words and not sighs!"

Nancy pondered over this for a moment. Then: "It's true," she said, "that I cannot imagine a weeping queen!"

"Except when the Knave of Hearts steals her tarts, all on a summer's day!" teased the Princess.

"But the Queen of Hearts wore *her* crown even when she was baking pies," declared Nancy.

"So we're back again at my crown, are we?" laughed the Queen. "I'll give you a picture of myself with my crown on, Nancy, and you can take it back to America with you. But you must tell them that it is not my crown that makes me a queen, but my love and my work, and whatever human understanding I have of the joys and sorrows of others.

The white veiled woman rose from her chair:

"Never forget that you've been here, Nancy. And when you go home, take a message of my love with you—won't you, little girl?"

"But I'll see you again by the Black Sea, shan't

I?" There was a sound of pleading in the child's voice.

"Yes, I hope so, Nancy. But now I must go back to the city. I am anxious and the King needs me; he is not well." And in the Queen's voice was a sound of tears.

"I'll pray that he may be better," said Nancy.

"We, too, will pray—night and morning," said Dobre and Florica. And turning to one of the saints on the walls, they bowed their heads, and crossed themselves several times.

"Then good-by for to-day, Nancy. God bless you, and keep you safe!"

Again that mother's touch of gentle hands on her head. And as if she were in a dream, Nancy allowed herself to be led from the room.

CHAPTER XXIII

The old man with the white hair was waiting outside the Queen's room, and he it was who showed the children all over the castle.

Never was there such a wonderful little castle as this one at Brana!

Up and down many winding stairs they went, along open galleries which actually hung over the courtyard, into heavily beamed or vaulted rooms, each one shaped differently from the last, and all with such mysterious, unexpected little corners, and such wonderful, huge fireplaces. One fireplace was so large that there was a little seat inside of it on which you could sit close to the flame. There were enchanting tower-rooms, with wee windows so high up that it made you giddy to look down from them upon the world beneath. There was even—oh, wonder of wonders!—a narrow secret staircase hewn out in the thickness of the

wall, in which the only light came from the baby flame of a tiny earthenware lamp which resembled those of the ancient catacombs.

And there were flowers in every corner, on every landing, in every window, on every table and chest, and beside every bed—as well as in great jars standing about the floors.

The beds were large and low, like couches, and they had wonderful colored covers and many soft cushions. Every object was so rare and curious that one wondered from what distant land it had been brought.

A wonder castle indeed!

But it was Ileana, the star-eyed Princess, who showed them over the gardens.

They were blue, yellow and violet with irises, as the Queen had said. The largest of the gardens was a large orchard meadow, full of old apple-trees in glorious bloom. In and out between the trees wound grass paths, bordered on both sides with irises, tulips and lupins—and with lovely creeping phlox running out into the paths in tumbled masses of pale mauve. Wherever you lifted your head,

there was the castle looking down upon you, a dream-vision painted against the sky.

"Later, the gardens will be full of roses, white lilies and delphiniums," explained Ileana, "and those are followed by fire-lilies, dahlias, asters, hollyhocks, marigolds, gladiolas and many other flowers. Mother knows their names better than I do. She brings back so many bulbs, roots and seeds from all her journeys, that she calls these her 'gardens of memory,' because they remind her of so many people and places she loves. I forgot to show you a tiny ivy plant in the courtyard which she brought from Washington's grave!"

The Princess then said good-by to them, expressing many wishes for their well-being, and the hope of meeting them again on the shores of the Black Sea. So charming was she, that the children were sad to leave her.

And now they started on their wanderings again after Matusa Daria had blessed them profusely, and filled their pockets and pouches with a plentiful supply of food.

"And to think that you are going to drag that

dear little foreign chicken all over the high mountains, and down through the plains to the sea!" she exclaimed. "And look out for the Haiduc. He is hiding somewhere in the deep forests. If you ever reach the Black Sea, I hope that Florica will send you back to your granny. If she doesn't, there'll be nothing left of you after more wandering."

"But we hope to see the Queen again by the Black Sea!" was Nancy's reply. "She says that she may be there when the lilies are in bloom!"

"Well, be careful that the Haiduc doesn't catch you first!"

And as they began climbing the steep mountainside up toward the dark fir forest, Nancy kept thinking of this warning.

Were they really to have the thrill of meeting the Haiduc? First the Queen, then the Haiduc! It would be too wonderful!

But a trace of a shudder passed over her. An exciting adventure, but it might also be a very dangerous one! And vaguely the words of all the wild songs about the Haiduc came back to her—

snatches floating through her mind as cloudlets drift through a summer sky.

"Oh, Mother, my Mother,
When the Haiduc is calling,
Restrain me from going—
I cannot resist him!"

And she remembered another verse which Florica had once sung to her of his coming. How did it go?

"O'er seven deep valleys,
And seven dark seas,
With seven black ravens,
As swift as the breeze—"

And indeed the woods up there were black, almost sinister—full of shadows—as they frowned down upon her.

If a raven had suddenly flown over the sky just then, I think that Nancy's heart would have popped out of her mouth!

Higher and higher they climbed. The forest was coming nearer, like a tremendous army

marching down upon the deep valleys—which seemed to be secret passages cut into the mountainside.

Evening found them seated around a large fire of dead branches which Dobre had built for them. Above their heads towered the tall firs, enormous, dusky, shutting out the inquisitive stars.

The sheep lay, mere shadows, in a wide circle around them. A faint wind whispered in the branches, a strange voice speaking of things which the children could not understand.

A little shiver ran down Nancy's back.

"I wonder if she is sleeping!" said Nancy.

"Who?" asked Florica.

"The Queen," whispered Nancy. "I can still feel the touch of her hands on my head. But her eyes are sad. I suppose that by this time there's a light in her castle window."

"Her eyes are sad because she's thinking of her little boy lying in the old church and of all the other children who died during the years of war and famine. You see, she is our Mother; and she saw all of those sorrows with her own eyes. And

then, too, did she not say that our dear King is sick?" explained Florica in her solemn voice.

"And I forgot to ask her if she had ever seen the Haiduc!" said Nancy. "There were many more things about which I wanted to ask her. She did not seem to mind answering questions."

"It seems to me that, as it was, you asked her more questions than one person could answer in a day," laughed Dobre.

"But, of course, she must know everything, because she's Queen," said Florica.

"Of course," assented the big brother. And then there was silence except for the sound of the branches whispering overhead.

The children had fallen asleep.

But there was another sound, coming nearer and nearer, although the children did not hear it, for it was still too far away. The sound of a horse galloping. . . .

The fire crackled. The flames spurted up toward the frowning trees above. The pine needles rustled. Occasionally there came the faint sighing of Dobre's sheep, breathing in their sleep.

A flutter of wings! A dark shadow—another—and yet another!

What was it—the wind? Or was it really the

beating of wings—of many, many ravens' wings? Ink-black, hushed, mysterious, sinister "messengers, flown o'er seven valleys and seven silent seas."

The Haiduc's ravens! A dark cloud of softly whispering, gently flapping, shadowy, stealthy wings!

The Haiduc's outrunners! And now, ever so much more distinctly, the sound of a horse's hoofs. . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

Nancy awoke with a start. What was it?

A fluttering of wings! The air was full of them! A tardy moon had risen above the trees, and was pouring a silver light down through their branches into the glade where the wanderers had been sleeping.

Dobre leaped to his feet, and stood like a ghost, white and pale, with a hundred dark wings fluttering above his head.

"Ravens!" he cried. "The Haiduc's ravens!"

"And hark! The sound of galloping hoofs!" came an answering cry from Florica.

The two girls scuttled like frightened rabbits to the shepherd's side.

Yes! That was the sound of galloping hoofs coming nearer and nearer. How on earth could a horse gallop so fast through the woods at night?

"Oh!" cried Nancy. In her voice was mingled ecstasy and fear.

Dobre's sheep, awakened by fright, began bleating. Huddled together in a dark mass, their voices were as piteous as those of children lost in the night.

The wild neigh of a horse! A cracking of broken branches! A tremendous plunge through the dark!

A rider on a coal-black charger crashed suddenly into their midst!

The Haiduc!

Nancy clapped her hands, while Dobre raised his staff as if in defense.

With quivering legs and wide-open nostrils, his unkempt mane and tail blown hither and thither by the wind, the horse seemed enormous in the pale moonlight. The man on his back was young and handsome, but there was something wild about his appearance. And the expression of his face was far from reassuring.

His belt bristled with daggers, and a gun was slung over one of his shoulders.

Full of hostility, the white-clad shepherd and the dark intruder faced each other as rivals.

"What are you doing in my realm?" shouted the rider.

"I'm a peaceful shepherd, crossing the hills with my sheep. Mountain and forest are mine as well as yours!" Dobre retorted angrily.

"We'll see about that!" declared the Haiduc. And as he spoke, his eyes suddenly discovered the two maidens. "One of them seems to be a stranger." He laughed wildly. "I, too, have a liking for such fair company!"

Dobre swung his staff, as if to ward off a blow. As he did so, the Haiduc swooped by, leaned down in his saddle with hawk-like rapidity, caught the frightened Nancy up in his arms, and with a cry of triumph, dashed off with her into the forest.

It seemed to Nancy that the whole forest was laughing—horribly—that every tree was in league with the Haiduc, wild Lord of the Hills.

CHAPTER XXV

Nancy heard Florica give a piercing shriek, saw her stretch out desperate arms.

After that she heard nothing more except the rush of the air through the trees, as the robber galloped furiously away, bearing her into the thickest forest.

Nancy had no idea how long that race lasted.

She was firmly clasped in the man's arms, half smothered under his cloak. All of the forest was zebraed with dark and light stripes by the moon. But the pace was too swift for her to see anything else—besides, the Haiduc's mantle kept flapping backward and forward over her eyes.

A sudden jerk! The horse, rearing on his hind legs, seemed to rise into the air. Nancy screamed. Her scream was answered by a shout of many voices. And this shout was caught up, and echoed again more faintly—probably by the hills.

Where was she? Laughter, shouts, excited run-

"THE HORSE SEEMED TO RISE INTO THE AIR."

ning hither and thither, and Nancy felt that she was standing on her feet, very shaky and bewildered. There were tears in her eyes, but she was unharmed.

Timidly she looked about her.

What a wonderful place!

Rocks in a circle, high, dark, unscalable; a gorge into which there appeared to be no opening. It might have been a stage-setting for a den of robbers and criminals.

The little girl shuddered.

Why had she not stayed home with Granny and old Sue, under the safe green roof of their bungalow? "Come here!" It was the Haiduc's voice.

Nancy was too afraid to disobey.

Despising herself for not making a braver resistance, she advanced toward her captor. All that she could do to save her pride, was to hold her head stiffly and to glare at the armed man with angry, defiant eyes.

But the Haiduc was dreadfully handsome! He looked exactly as he should have looked—fearful

but magnificent—with his dark cloak, his daggers, his gun. In a half-circle, his band stood around him. They were not so splendid as their master, but one and all they were imposing—a stalwart crew of ruffians, armed to the teeth.

"You're a stranger, my girl," said the Haiduc. "Who are you?"

Nancy resented his masterful tone, and this gave her courage to reply proudly—although her voice sounded small in this great vastness:

"I'm a free American, and in America no one has ever been troubled on the highroads, except by Red Indians—and even that was long ago, for they are well-behaved nowadays!"

"Which means that we are not! Thank you, small maiden! But in the first place, you are not in America; and in the second place, you were not on the highroad. The mountain passes are mine!"

"You are not as noble as you look," declared Nancy with spirit.

"So I look noble, do I?" laughed the desperado. "That, at least, is good to hear. But come, little

guest, let me offer you a bit of food. Our ride was a trifle violent!"

"I don't want your food." Nancy's voice trembled. "I want Florica and Dobre!"

"I suppose Dobre was that fine ghost of a fellow, all in white?"

"He's not a ghost. He's just as much alive as you are—and far kinder." This with a fine little snort from Nancy.

"Oho! I like your spirit, little one. But come along with me, even if you are not hungry. I have a surprise for you. You are taking a high tone with the Lord of the Wilderness. But when you see who is my guest, you'll open your eyes, I promise you!"

"What sort of guest can *you* have?"

Nancy was now so angry that she felt very brave. Also, in spite of herself, she could not help admiring the Haiduc, who was so exactly her idea of a real ruffian hero—the sort of hero whom you never meet nowadays. This would be a wonderful adventure to relate at home—but of course it would still have to end well, for all good stories do.

"What sort of guest? Just wait till you see! You seem to forget who I am!"

"A robber!" snorted Nancy. "A thief who steals maiden's hearts and tosses them away when he is tired of them! Oh, I know about you!"

The Haiduc threw back his head, and filled the night with peals of laughter.

Rude of him, thought Nancy. But she could not help remarking what splendid white teeth he had, and how his eyes flashed like black diamonds in the moonlight.

"Enough talk! Come along—or do you want me to carry you?" And her captor advanced toward her with a threatening gesture, although his lips were still smiling.

"No, I'm coming!" Nancy tried to speak without undignified haste.

"I like you," declared the stalwart man. "Follow me, and you'll not regret it!"

And so Nancy followed the terrible Haiduc through the moonlight, toward the dark wall of rocks.

Really, it was all like a dream!

CHAPTER XXVI

Suddenly Nancy cried out with astonishment.

And who do you think was sitting there on a rock—as if it were a throne?

The Queen, you guess?

Yes!

There she was! And—most astounding!—she was wearing the golden robe and mantle which Ileana had described. And this time she had her crown on her head!

Such a massive crown it was! It differed from other crowns because a round pendant hung down from each side of it—like wee shields over the Queen's ears.

"To-night," thought Nancy, "she looks like a picture-book queen. Even the Queen of Hearts might envy her that crown."

Rocks formed the background for the regal picture. They were dark and forbidding, and rose as if they were the mighty walls of some

great hall in which the Queen was enthroned.

In dusky rows upon a ledge above her head, sat the Haiduc's ravens, a black frieze silvered by the moon.

How had the Queen come there? How could she have climbed the mountains, and picked her way through the thick forest, in such gorgeous attire?

Leaning from her high seat, she smiled down upon the bewildered child:

"So it's you, little Nancy! You never imagined, did you, that we would meet again so soon?"

"But, you see, I shouldn't be here at all," explained Nancy; "I was stolen by the Haiduc."

"Oh, is that how it happened?" exclaimed the Queen.

"Yes. It was so rude of him that I wish you would scold him. Of course," she added hastily, "I am glad to see you again! But really, it was not fair to carry me off in the middle of the night."

"But the Haiduc is one of Roumania's favorite heroes you know," said Her Majesty.

"That may be," conceded Nancy, "but in

America we have our own ideas about liberty!"

"Yes, I know. The first thing that I saw when we steamed into New York harbor, was your Statue of Liberty. I'm happy to hear that all of you so loyally respect what she stands for."

Nancy did not quite understand this, but it sounded well, and at least the Queen admired the Statue of Liberty.

"But why are you here?" asked the child. "If we had a queen in America, she wouldn't visit robbers—especially when she was wearing her crown and her coronation robes."

"Ah! You see," explained the Queen, "the Haiduc is very much like Robin Hood. And although an outlaw, Robin Hood was a gentleman, you know."

"But you can't pretend that the Haiduc is a gentleman, can you?" Nancy was shocked.

"That's what I mean!"

"But he stole me!" cried Nancy with indignation. "He stole me away from my friends, and half smothered me under his cloak to keep me from seeing anything."

"That *was* awkward of him," admitted the royal lady, "because on moonlight nights the forest is truly beautiful. He should have allowed you to see it."

"But you don't seem to be shocked at the way in which he carried me off," cried Nancy.

"What if I had asked him to bring you here?"

"You!"

Nancy's voice was an exclamation of horrified protest.

"Yes, I!"

Her Majesty was smiling. "Suppose that I wanted to have you taken back into olden times?"

"Into olden times?"

Nancy stared. What on earth did the Queen mean?

"Yes. Because there is no Haiduc to-day except in song," explained the Queen.

"Then why are you and I here? And all those ravens . . . and the moonlight . . . and your voice . . . ?"

"And the Haiduc?"

It was that bold brigand himself who spoke these words.

Nancy stared at him.

How handsome he was! What black eyes, what white teeth he had! And the silver hilts of his daggers and pistols gleamed like so many lights under the moon. Was he better looking than Dobre, the shepherd. Was he . . . ?

But as she stared, the Haiduc's face seemed to become less distinct. A mist passed before it.

And the Queen . . . ?

Was a mist rising? The Queen's face also had become blurred. Her voice sounded far away.

"Suppose that I had taken you back into olden times, Nancy. The Haiduc, you know, was always a protector of the poor. Therefore he is the Queen's friend. The Haiduc, like Robin Hood, steals only from those who have much and give little.

"The Haiduc. . . ."

There was a sudden rush of wings!

All the ravens had risen into the air! Their blackness was shutting out the light of the moon,

was screening the glittering vision of the Queen from the bewildered child's gaze.

"The Haiduc is the Queen's ally. In olden times, the Queen . . ."—the voice was growing fainter and fainter—"always wore her crown. And when the Haiduc had collected great treasures . . ."

Nancy had a last luminous vision of the crowned woman, and for a moment her voice was distinct again!

" . . . he gave his wealth to the Queen to divide among the poor. And she herself came to honor him. The Haiduc . . ."

"Nancy! Wake up!"

What was that?

"Nancy, hurry! We must start again!"

That was surely Florica's voice. How had she found the Haiduc's lair?

"Wake up, Nancy!"

"But the Haiduc!" murmured Nancy, "and the Queen!"

"Nancy, you're dreaming."

"Dreaming?" cried Nancy.

Relief and regret mingled in her voice.

"You've quite forgotten where we are!" said Florica.

"Where we are?"

Nancy was now wide awake, rubbing her eyes.

"But the ravens? The black horse? The moonlight? And the Queen's golden gown?"

"Come, Nancy!" It was Dobre's voice. "Our *mamaliga* is ready. We must be off!"

And there stood Dobre, with his flock about him and it was not the moon, but the sun, which was making him gleam like a candle!

"Dobre, didn't you hear the Haiduc?"

"The Haiduc, little stranger? How should I have heard him?"

"But you stood there with your staff, ready to fight him—when the air was full of the ravens' wings!"

"Little girl, you've been dreaming!"

"Dreaming! But I saw the Queen! She was wearing her crown and her coronation mantle. She sat on a rock, with the ravens perched above her, as if they were on guard!"

"Dreaming, dreaming!" Dobre shook his head. "Your mind was so full of the Queen and the Haiduc that you *had* to dream about them, I suppose."

"But the Haiduc's great black horse, with the long mane and tail! Didn't you see him leap, hear him neigh?"

"Nancy," said Florica, "sit down. We must eat our *mamaliga* and be off!"

Nancy sat down. The sun was filtering shyly through the trees.

"But I felt the Haiduc's cloak smothering me," insisted Nancy, her mouth full of *mamaliga.*

"I hope that he was as good-looking as our songs make him!" said Florica, and she laughed.

"Does he really exist only in song?" asked Nancy. There was real disappointment in her voice.

"Well," confessed Florica, "I've never seen him, nor has any one else whom I know. They've only *heard* about him, as one hears of Moses or Trajan or the Fairy Godmother."

"But she told me that he was good to the poor,

and that he stole only from the rich!" insisted Nancy.

"Who told you?"

"The Queen!"

"Well, well!" exclaimed Dobre. His mouth, too, was full of *mamaliga.*

"It's quite true. The Haiduc is a friend of the poor and of the defenseless."

"But then he *does* exist?" Nancy asked anxiously.

"Does or did. Did or does?" laughed Florica.

"Well, I'm all muddled up!" sighed Nancy. "I really did see her there on her throne of rocks, gleaming in the moonlight. And the Haiduc was handsome!"

"That's as it should be," said Florica, and again she laughed. Sometimes solemn Florica laughed like any other little girl, but not often. Perhaps she lived too near to the Rising Sun?

CHAPTER XXVII

For many, many days the three friends wandered through hills and forests.

Dobre had been eager to meet an old shepherd whom he expected to find on the mountain top, even at this early season. Sherban Scurtu was always one of the first to return from the plains and climb back to the mountains, after the long winter's rest.

Dobre meant to leave his sheep under the care of that dependable guardian. Being eager to escort their little guest as far as the shores of the Black Sea, he knew that they could travel more rapidly if they were not trammeled by the slow-moving flock.

Sherban Scurtu proved to be all that the boy had expected. Gruff but kindly, he made no objection to shepherding Dobre's fold as well as his own.

"Go ahead, youngster! Scurtu will look after your flock. I'm old and you're young—and it's

not every day that one is host to such a sweet little guest from beyond the blue."

And the old man gave a low, kindly laugh.

Nancy was delighted with old Sherban. With his shaggy beard and long gray locks, he looked like one of the twelve apostles grown old in the

wilderness. He had many yarns to spin, and as the children rested with him for three days, Nancy had ample time to listen to all of them.

From the spot where he had erected his shelter of earth and sticks, there was a wide-sweeping view of hills and valleys, and plains beneath.

A magic view! It was so limitless, hazy and dreamlike that you wondered whether it was imagination or reality. It filled you with a sense of peace and comfort; life seemed natural and easy up here, so far above the world.

However, old Scurtu knew nothing at all about certain things of which Nancy spoke. Nor was there any use in trying to make him understand them; such things, for instance, as sky-scrapers, elevators, wireless telegraphs and radios. He would shake his head, smiling like a wise child who is willing to *listen* to fairy-tales but who does not mean to believe them.

"No, little one. It sounds very wonderful! Houses forty stories high! Boxes which shoot you up to the top as if by magic! Voices which you can hear from any distance! No, no, my child,

don't muddle my poor old brain with them, for it is accustomed to small huts, corn-thatched and cozy; they are large enough for me. And the only voice which I need is that of God—and I hear it in the church bells, in the wind. . . ."

"But I assure you," insisted Nancy, "that we use other wonderful inventions. They save trouble and they save time."

"Time?" A slow smile came to the shepherd's lips. "What's time? We don't need to hurry, my sheep and I. We know by the lengthening or shortening of the days what season it is, and whether wintertime, when we must quit our hills, is far away or close at hand."

Listening to him, Nancy had the drowsy sensation that, indeed, nothing did matter at all, and that a view such as Scurtu had daily before his eyes, could fill heart and brain to the exclusion of all sense of haste.

"But I don't want to feel that way," said Nancy to herself; for the East and West were quarreling within her, the present and the past, to-day and yesterday. But there was such charm in that yes-

terday that she had to make an effort to prevent it from putting her to sleep.

She told Scurtu her dream of the Haiduc, and Scurtu declared that perhaps it was not a dream at all. He had never seen the Haiduc, but that did not prove that he did not exist!

"But the Queen was there, wearing her crown and a golden robe!" cried Nancy.

"God bless her, and give her health and long life," said Sherban. "It's right that she should wear her crown."

No, decidedly Nancy could not astonish old Sherban Scurtu. He knew of things eternal, such as stars, sun, moon, rain and wind—he needed neither radios, nor elevators, nor any other machines.

"I am fond of him," sighed Nancy, when the time came for moving on. And she was truly sad to leave the old man who had the face of an apostle grown old in the wilderness.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Old Scurtu had replenished the children's pouches with a new supply of *mamaliga*. He had also given them some white sheep-cheese which he had made himself, and even some onions—although he had little to give, and although he knew that the children would soon reach the plains beneath, where it was easy to get food, while he, on his mountain, had to be sparing, since there were few occasions when he could renew his meager store.

Nancy was no longer particular about what she ate. Everything tasted good in this keen mountain air, and their continual walking sharpened her appetite astonishingly.

Nancy's shoes were in a sad state. Good, stout American shoes although they were, they were all but wrecked!

"We must get some *opinci*," declared Florica. "And when your dress is in rags, we'll get you one like mine."

"Then I'll look like the magic doll of Roumania that you were, when you came to our bungalow!" laughed Nancy.

I do not think that Granny or old Sue would have been very proud of Nancy's appearance at that moment.

She certainly looked healthy, but with ragged dress, battered shoes, unkempt hair, sunburned face and grimy hands, she was far from being what a neat, freshly washed little American girl should be.

It must be confessed that by this time Nancy had all the appearance of the little tramp that she had become. She resembled her companions in another way, also: she no longer kept count of time. But the days were growing longer, and although they still waded through occasional drifts of old snow in the mountain gorges, when they reached the flat land, they found the fruit-trees far past their bloom, many meadows full of flowers, and hay already being cut.

Although Nancy had become as hard as a nail, she was grateful when one or another of the slow-

moving carts offered them a lift. There was something delightfully dreamy in this slow advance along a straight, white road which spread endlessly before them like a broad ribbon, unwinding as they went. The springless carts creaked, moaned and bumped, and nothing seemed to hurry the placid, slow-moving, large-eyed, wide-horned oxen.

Sometimes, perched high upon a stack of wood, Nancy would contemplate the world from her exalted but uneasy seat; or deep in soft, fragrant hay, she would lie on her back and gaze up at the gentian-blue sky until, shading her eyes with her arm, she would finally fall asleep.

When they journeyed in carts, they were hidden by a haze of dust which rose from the wheels and the oxen's feet. They seemed to see everything through a veil which turned from gray to gold as the sun sank in the west.

But whenever an automobile dashed by, the dust became intolerable, and stifling clouds hung in its wake long after—leaving a gritty feeling between Nancy's teeth.

"Horrid things!" she would exclaim. "Why must they go so fast?" And she would indignantly bury her face in her hands.

"Nearly all of them come from America, you know. That's your progress, little stranger," teased the shepherd.

"But the dust is not American," retorted the indignant Nancy.

Yet strangely enough Nancy never felt sorry that she was in the groaning cart instead of being in the wind-quick motor, so accustomed had she become to this slow, dreamy form of travel.

Never had she felt so near the earth, so much a part of the whole of Nature.

Florica had proposed that on their way toward the sea, they should pass through Bucharest, Roumania's capital city, but Dobre had protested.

"It's out of our way," he said. "And if Nancy wanted to see sky-scrapers and such things, Bucharest would disappoint her. Of course it has some large shops and finely dressed people, a palace and many churches, but it has none of the

beauty of our plains, and forests and mountains. They are the *real* Roumania. Nancy has cities

enough in her own huge country. Let's show her what she does not have at home!"

So they avoided the towns, and continued their

slow way along highroads which ran through villages, through vast fields in which wheat and and barley were ripening to gold; past lost-looking wells, with long poles pointing to the skies; and past lonely stone crosses, quaintly carved with strange devices—sacred monuments of the days of yore, which were now old, scarred and forgotten.

They trudged along the banks of willow-bordered rivers, whose shallow waters flowed sluggishly over broad beds of sand or stones; they crossed rickety bridges which trembled under their feet; they passed gypsy fires of an evening, when the day's toil was done. And generally the stars watched over their sleep.

On, on they went, not counting the days. They were hospitably received at every cottage at which they stopped, and kindly answered by every peasant from whom they asked advice—everywhere they saw friendly faces. Even the poorest was always ready to share his last morsel of food, and no hut was too small to shelter them—even overnight, if necessary.

On, on, till they came to wide, willow-grown

swamps—the forerunners of the broad Danube—which they must cross before reaching their final goal.

In these swamps Nancy saw hundreds of black and white storks, marching about. Stiff-legged and important-looking, they had an air of birds which could at any moment be called upon to fulfill the important mission of their kind. Their long red legs gave them the appearance of being dressed in livery. For some reason, they seemed to be something more than mere birds, and entitled to respect.

"Many babies must be born in your land to keep so many storks busy," observed Nancy.

"I've never seen them carrying babies," said Florica, "but I *have* seen them gobbling frogs. I am sure about the frogs, but not so certain about the babies. At any rate, storks or no storks, we *do* have many babies in our villages, although not all of them live to grow up."

"Don't you look after them?" asked Nancy.

"Well, most of them look after themselves. Their mothers, you see, work. Often their elder

sisters look after them; I looked after the twins. But when there's no elder sister . . ."

Florica left her sentence unfinished.

"What then?" persisted Nancy.

Florica shrugged her shoulders, and made a vague gesture with her hands—which might have meant anything.

"Have you no Child Welfare and that sort of thing?"

Florica's face was a blank.

"Don't ladies and district nurses and doctors come to give you help and advice?"

"Our villages are far away," said Florica vaguely.

"But the Queen?" demanded Nancy.

"She's our Mother," was Florica's fervent reply.

"But a mother usually helps," insisted the little American.

"Of course she helps when we ask her to. But we only ask her when we need something."

Nancy shook her head. She loved her little friend, and she had a warm feeling for Dobre, but when she tried to be practical with them, they

seemed to become vague and to evade her. There was no sense of progress in them, no "push," no vigor. They were contented with things as they were—although really Baba Zoë's hut, for instance, while delightful to look at, left plenty of room for improvement.

"When I'm grown up," thought Nancy, "I'll come back here and teach them to be progressive." Young as she was, Nancy had heard a great deal at home about being "progressive." But these friends of hers did not seem even to know the meaning of the word!

Yet how lovely it was here, among the willow-trees! How calm, how restful, how dreamy!

Yes, this was a dreamy land.

Then Nancy remembered how Florica had said that this was a country near the Rising Sun. Probably that had something to do with their lack of progress!

Nancy drew a deep sigh of contentment. She was glad that she was not grown up, and that she did not have to begin yet to be progressive. It was so delightful to sit here and watch the sun

going down; no hurry, no pressure, no noise.

Peace and quiet—and over there stood Dobre, his back against a spreading poplar, playing on his flute. Decidedly the sunsets loved Dobre and his flute!

CHAPTER XXIX

Nancy was duly impressed by the great bridge over the Danube: "King Carol's bridge," Dobre called it, because it had been built during the reign of King Carol, who was King Ferdinand's uncle.

"Ferdinand became our second King, because King Carol had no children—except a little girl who died when she was very young," explained Dobre.

"And Ferdinand married Marie, who came from over the seas when she was young," was Florica's addition to her brother's history lesson.

"Is she the Queen?" asked Nancy.

"Yes, the Queen whom we saw in her castle—and whom we hope to meet again by the Black Sea. She began by being a princess."

"And our first Queen was a very good Mother," said the shepherd boy. "But her hair was gray instead of golden. She wrote beautiful verses,

and was a poet whom the whole world loved. Her name was Carmen Silva."

"And Queen Marie, my Queen?" asked Nancy. "Does she write poetry?"

"I don't know," confessed Dobre. "They say she's written a book about our brave soldiers, and many stories for children—and a book about Roumania. She wants the whole world to love Roumania."

"She's laughed with us and wept with us; she has known good days and bad."

Florica had said this before. It was a picture to which she seemed to cling as the reason that they loved Regina Maria and her brave King.

"But she said that the King was very sick, didn't she?"

"Yes. We must pray for him." And Dobre took off his bonnet.

"And King Carol, the old King, built this bridge!" Nancy's voice was full of wonder.

"It's a very large bridge for one man to build!"

"I don't think that he built it with his own hands," explained Dobre. "He ordered it to be

built—for until that time it was a long way around to the sea. Now we can go to it from Bucharest, in a straight line."

As the children were speaking, and looking up at the huge Danube bridge, a train rushed over the high viaduct. Up there, far above their heads, it looked like a caterpillar—at least it would have if a caterpillar could go at such a pace.

"We also have great bridges in America," said Nancy.

"Have you seen them?"

"No; but we have many books with pictures."

"I'd love to have books," sighed Dobre.

"We have our songs," said Florica.

"And my flute," added Dobre.

"And our sunrises and sunsets," said Florica.

"And our rivers and mountains," added Dobre.

"And the Black Sea," laughed Nancy. "And you live near the Rising Sun."

Thus, chattering busily, the children crossed the great bridge.

And on and on they still walked, until at last they reached the Sea. The Black Sea!

It was not black at the time when Nancy had her first glimpse of it. It was a deep indigo blue, and small white clouds were floating over it. It looked calm and reassuring. It filled you with a longing to sail out over it—far, far away. . . .

"I'm not facing America, am I?" asked Nancy.

"No, no! Over there on the other side of the Black Sea is Russia, I believe."

"And there's also a city somewhere called Constantinople," added his sister.

"Geography is so hard," sighed Nancy.

"But we've taught you all about Roumania in a pleasant way, haven't we?"

"Ah! yes!" agreed the little American. "I wish that all geography lessons were like that—even if they wore out my shoes!"

"Over there, do you see a town?" Dobre pointed with his hand.

"Yes!"

"That's our port. It's called Constantza."

"Why didn't you take me there?"

"We'd be lost in a town," said the shepherd.

"Do many ships come to your port?"

"I suppose so," Dobre was rather vague. He knew more about sheep than about ships.

"If you were an American boy, you'd probably know how many ships came to your port every year, and what they brought and what they took away."

"Would he?" Florica was much impressed.

"But you don't seem to care much about such things," said Nancy.

"I don't expect ever to cross the sea," explained Dobre, rather lamely.

"Don't you want to come to America?"

"They say that people go to America when their own countries are too full. Ours is not too full," replied Dobre.

"And we're nearer the Rising Sun here," added Florica, who had a quaint way of repeating certain sentences.

Nancy was seated on a mound of earth near the edge of a cliff, which overhung the sea. She looked up at her two friends. How different they were from any one she had ever seen in America! They were like a picture, standing side by side in

their quaint costumes. Vaguely she felt that she would never really understand them—they were so calm, they asked so few questions, they were so little interested in the whys and wherefores of things. And when they spoke, all their words were pictures—as they themselves were pictures—which impressed themselves on your mind, and remained with you always.

America was as beautiful as Roumania, but it did not make such pictures.

Nancy thought of how much she loved Florica and Dobre—but there was a touch of sadness about her love. You always feel a little tinge of sadness when you don't quite understand people; it gives you a feeling of loneliness—a sense of trying to grasp a mist with your hands.

Dobre, with his large eyes wide open, was gazing over the water. With both hands clasped on the top of his shepherd's staff, he was resting his chin upon them. What was he thinking? And beside him stood Florica. She, too, resembled a painting. You can hardly imagine how slim she was, in her tightly folded skirt, which she called a

"WHAT WAS HE THINKING?"

catrintza. She, also, was able to remain absolutely still—as still as a statue—with her eyes fixed upon the distance. What did she see?

How flat the land was—as flat as the sea below! There seemed to be two seas, one above the other. And what masses of wild flowers! They were a real garden! What gorgeous violet splashes those pea-flowers made! And never had Florica seen such enormous thistles; their prickly leaves drew strange, intricate green patterns against the blue of the sky.

Nancy felt a sort of drowsiness stealing over her. The perfect stillness of her companions seemed to throw her into a trance. Nothing seemed real any more. The world was becoming a vast, never-ending vision—a very quiet dream, lovely and enormous, in which rich colors, pleasant sensations, and a harmony of sounds, blended into one—until she began to feel that never again would she need to ask questions, or wonder at anything, or hurry, or fuss, or learn, or progress.

Blue sky. Blue Sea. Green world of flowers.

And, painted against the horizon, Florica and

Dobre—two dream-figures in this land near the Rising Sun. Two friends!

The land near the Rising Sun!

I am not quite sure, but I *think* that just then Nancy fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXX

"This point is called Caliacra," said Dobre.

The three children were standing on a narrow tongue of land which jutted out into the sea.

It was a wild, lonely place. But what colors! The ground upon which they stood was a wilderness of scattered stones, but it was marvelous because hundreds and thousands of poppies had sprung up between the stones, as if sown by some magic hand, and had covered the waste with a carpet of brilliant scarlet.

The ground seemed to be flaming—and the more so because it was the hour of sunset. Roumania seemed to love this hour as an artist might love colors which he had invented and which no other painter had ever before even imagined.

Nancy, with Dobre firmly holding her hand, advanced carefully to the very edge of the cliffs which overhung the water. How steep they were! They were jagged, giant walls, bright Indian red

in color, and at their base began the sea's blue-green expanse. It looked wickedly, secretly deep. And, as the sun sank lower and lower, the red of the rocks, as if it were dye, began to tint the surface of the sea, until it turned into seething copper—over which ripples of sapphires, emeralds and turquoises glittered continually. Finally the entire water took on the colors of a peacock's tail. It was so bright and so fascinating that, as Nancy gazed down upon it, she felt as if some force which she could not resist were pulling at her from below.

"Don't go too near the edge, little stranger. The mermaids might beckon to you, and then you would not be able to stay on the land."

"Are they down there?"

"Yes; and when they are lonely, they rise from the water, and sing such rapturous songs that no human being can resist them."

"What happens to you then?"

"Then comes a mad desire to throw yourself into the sea."

Nancy drew back with a shudder; and Dobre felt her hand tremble in his.

"And what else is down there?"

Her eyes were full of inquiry, and, despite a sense of dread, she felt that she must peep once more into the depths beneath.

"Shells and fishes, and a thousand living creatures which are half-animals and half-plants."

Here Florica's voice chimed in: "Not only living things, but also lost treasures from sunken ships, and the bleached bones of sailors and fishermen who never returned to their homes."

"And see those many sea-gulls, skimming over the water with melancholy cries," added Dobre. "They are the souls of those who died without an opportunity to say farewell to their loved ones."

Then, for a time, the children stopped talking. A great hush fell over the world. The flaming colors were paling. The sea-gulls' wings were becoming whiter and whiter. Dusk was beginning to creep over the world. For a moment the sun hung suspended, a fiery ball over the horizon. Then, suddenly, it dipped into the sea, and was gone.

Hand in hand stood the three children, while the shadows thickened around them. How still it was! How strangely still!

Suddenly a voice disturbed the silence. They turned and saw an old man standing beside them—an old man with a white beard and a head of snow-white hair.

"Have you come to say a prayer on Saint Nicholas' grave?" he asked.

"Saint Nicholas!" three astonished voices exclaimed.

"Yes. Don't you know that he is buried here among our rocks?"

"Who are you?" asked Nancy in an awed whisper.

"Oh! I'm only the old keeper of the Caliacra lighthouse. I've lived here for so many years that I have stopped counting them."

"I'm an American," volunteered Nancy.

"Dear, dear! You must have come in a ship?"

"I—I don't exactly know," stammered Nancy.

"Well, that's queer." But the old man did not seem much interested or surprised.

"Shall I take you to Saint Nicholas?"

"Is he the one with the white beard, who brings children presents in a sack?"

The old fellow shook his head.

"No, no! He is our own special Saint Nicholas. Some say that he was a hermit, and others say that he was a pirate who was up to all sorts of tricks."

"A fine sort of saint!" Nancy sniffed.

"And what do *you* think he was?" asked Florica.

"Well, well!" The old man scratched his head. "He may have begun as a pirate and ended as a saint. Stranger things have happened. The fact remains that he's Saint Nicholas now, and that he's buried here, and that he has a superb view out over the sea! Come along, before it gets too dark. And you'll see the little silver lamp which the Queen has hung over his grave."

"The Queen!" There was a thrill in Nancy's voice.

"Yes, the Queen. She loves this place, and comes here often. So does the Princess, who runs all about over the rocks, barefooted, like a moun-

tain sheep. The Queen never forgets to visit me in my lighthouse!"

" 'And, Costica,' she once said to me, 'you must always keep Saint Nicholas' grave tidy. And I'll bring him a silver lamp, if you will plant some of the wild Dobrugea irises on his tomb!' She has time even for dead saints in desert places.

"And she knew that I would not have far to go to find those little irises. She would not have told me to plant roses, because she knows that no roses grow here—and that I am old and my legs are shaky! She's fond of gardening, the Queen is!"

Thus chatting, white-haired Costica led the way, down between steep and broken rocks, to a small promontory which was half shut in by overhanging cliffs. It was almost a grotto, open toward the sea.

Here, in the half-dark, the children discerned a small white stone cross, which stood at the head of a narrow grave that was thickly covered with the pointed leaves of dwarf irises, now past their bloom.

"The whole grave is blue and violet when they

are in flower," said the old guardian proudly.

Behind the cross, a low niche had been hewn out of the rock near the ground, and in it hung a small lamp of chased silver. Below the lamp was the painted image of a very old saint. His beard was long. His widely opened eyes seemed to be gazing past them, toward the sea.

"He doesn't look like a pirate!" Nancy was leaning over the icon in order to see it better. There was disappointment in her voice.

Old Costica, a little shocked at so irreverent a remark, explained that even if he *had* been a pirate to begin with, he certainly would have had to look like a saint when he became one. That was the least that he could do—or that a painter could do for him!

Nancy, looking up at the white-bearded face above her, could not help thinking that perhaps Saint Nicholas had looked much like Costica in real life. What a pity that Saint Nicholas was dead! Nancy would have enjoyed making the acquaintance of a live saint. And perhaps he would have told her whether he really had been a

pirate first—and whether it was pleasanter to be a pirate or a saint. "At any rate, he must have had more fun as a pirate," she said to herself.

"But now, my little chickens, you'd better come and share a solitary old man's supper, and sleep this night at the foot of the lighthouse under his roof."

Bending down over the sacred picture, Dobre and Florica crossed themselves. Then all four together slowly climbed the hill toward the lighthouse.

Turning back for a last glimpse of the saint's grave, the children could still see the Queen's lamp, a twinkling speck in the vastness of the night.

"See," said Florica, "it is as if the smallest star of the heavens had come down to watch over Saint Nicholas' grave."

"Yes. He would have been lonely otherwise," added Dobre.

"I wonder if the Queen knows that it looks like a star," mused Nancy.

"I light it every evening," explained old

Costica, "every single evening, when I light the beacon."

"But it does look like a star—a wee, lonely star," insisted Florica. "And I shall always be glad to think that Saint Nicholas has a light burning for him all through the night."

CHAPTER XXXI

Two days later, three sunburned, dust-covered, weary little waifs arrived at the small sea-town of Balcic.

What a queer little place it was!

After a long tramp over a plain as flat as the back of a man's hand, the children had come quite suddenly upon a deep gorge. Here the earth was torn asunder, as if by some tremendous convulsion, and a widening valley dipped steeply downward toward the sea.

What a curious, gray-white world! Gray-white cliffs, which shone like silver in the sun! Gray-white houses of clay, wood or stone, tumbling down the hillsides one on top of the other, as if they found it a hard task to keep a firm footing upon such bare slopes!

Here and there a slim minaret painted a white column against the sky. Now and again solemn, mouse-gray donkeys picked their slow way down

toward the harbor, over steep and stony paths which wound between crumbling walls.

And everywhere were Turks, as slow, solemn and patient as the donkeys which they drove before them! At how many quaint fountains and wells of Eastern design, did whole flocks of sheep come to drink—as did also those tame but savage-looking buffaloes, with curved horns and absent-minded faces!

How brightly the copper and pewter vessels which the Tartar women were carrying over their shoulders upon wooden yokes, shone in the glittering light!

And what picturesque, gay-colored groups these women formed, in their baggy cotton trousers of old greens, blues and mauves. Their hair was tightly braided into many little plaits; their henna-dyed eyebrows drew straight lines over their foreheads. They chattered and laughed, showing extraordinarily white teeth.

Very different from these noisy groups were the Turkish women, in their sober black caftans, with their white head-cloths drawn half over their faces.

They looked as if they were on their way to a funeral, and they flitted past as noiselessly as shadows.

The water that flowed from the many fountains looked deliciously fresh and cool.

Beyond, the sea shone like a turquoise carpet woven with threads of light.

The children had reached the principal street; the pavement was rough and uneven—which made Nancy realize how tired were her feet.

"Look," cried Florica suddenly, "there are flags everywhere! The Queen must be here! In every village, our people always raise the flag when the King or Queen comes."

"But see!" chimed in Dobre. "Every flag has a large black veil fastened to it! What can it mean?"

"Let's stop and ask," proposed Nancy, the practical one.

It was no use to ask a Turk, since he would hardly understand Roumanian, but over there was a dark fellow who would probably be able to tell them. He was sitting before his door, among his

pots and pans, his rugs and stuffs, and his other wares—which overflowed from his shop onto the pavement.

The dark fellow talked very poor Roumanian. He was probably a Bulgarian, or perhaps an Armenian. For Balcic had once been a Bulgarian town, and its population was very mixed. At any rate, the shopman did not seem to understand Dobre's question—and this may have been partly because he was an extraordinary sleepy chap. He was amiable, however, and he pointed with a lazy hand toward a brown-coated policeman, who was lolling in the middle of the street. It seemed to Nancy that nobody here had anything to do. Removing his bonnet, Dobre politely asked this casual-looking representative of the law, why the flags were all flying and why they were veiled with black.

"Don't you know?" exclaimed the policeman, shaken for a moment from his comfortable calm. "Our good King is dead, and the Queen has come here to rest!"

"Ah! our kind, brave King, who brought all

the Roumanians together and made our Unity. This is terrible news!" cried Dobre, full of grief.

A few loiterers, lolling in front of the houses and shops, joined the small group in the middle of the street, and one after another spoke of the sad event.

"Such a worthy King!" said one voice.

"We'll never have such another!" said an old man.

"And to die thus, so long before his time—and when his country needed him so greatly!" said a third voice.

"May God rest his soul and give comfort to our Queen! She has suffered much. It has been enough to test her patience."

"And now there's a child on the throne—little Michael!"

"May God give him health and a long life in which to serve his people!" cried many voices together.

"Poor little chicken, may he be blessed—and his poor mother with him!" It was a woman's voice who said this. Shaking her head, she added:

"They say that on the night after the King's death the blue-eyed little fellow put a small lamp in the window, so that his grandfather could see from Heaven that he was thinking of him!"

"Bless his little heart!" exclaimed a fat old mother, who also had stopped to listen.

"And the Queen?" asked Nancy anxiously.

"She loves our Balcic!" proclaimed a villager, who evidently felt that this was a matter of no small importance for this humble seaport.

"And the Queen finds rest here, near our Sea!" said the motherly woman.

"She has turned her gardens from a waste place into a paradise."

"May God give her many days! She is our Mother and now that our good Father is dead, there will be more things than ever to appeal to the mercy of her heart."

"She has loved us," said another voice, "as she loved her own family. But her own first-born broke her heart."

The fat old woman crossed herself. "His father, who has gone to Heaven, will plead for

him. Up there he knows how much his son must regret what he has done!"

"Those who tear themselves away from Roumania always regret."

"Where is the Queen?" asked Florica. Her voice was full of emotion.

"Over there!" The brown-coated policeman pointed with a small stick toward a spot beyond the town which looked like an oasis—a green garden in a silver waste.

"We'll go to her," said Dobre. He spoke very quietly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for them to go to the Queen. But Nancy noticed that his eyes, too, were full of tears.

CHAPTER XXXII

"How could it be called the Black Sea!"

With clasped hands, Nancy stood gazing out over a sheet of shimmering, glittering blue.

What light, what color, what sunshine! And what a refreshing sea breeze fanned her heated cheeks!

And there stood the Queen's home.

As white as if it were a dream, and quaintly Eastern in shape, it rose unexpectedly. It was a snowy picture against a green background. Its tall minaret seemed to be a watch tower to overlook the sea.

The Queen had named her little house "Tenha Yuvah," which meant, in Turkish, "Solitary Nest."

It was, indeed, a corner to come to for rest, for health, joy or peace.

And there, proudly waving from a small squat tower, was the same flag which Nancy had seen

flying on the little old fortress in the Transylvanian hills; red, with a blue border, and bearing an orange eagle in the center.

The children were walking across a long paved terrace which overlooked the sea, and which had a narrow canal of fresh, cool water running down the middle of it. Overhead was a pergola of rough beams, with roses, glycines and vines running riot over it; beneath, the sea, lapping against the base of the wall.

And flowers everywhere! A blaze of color! Tall hollyhocks of every conceivable hue, giant canterbury-bells, flaming poppies, late irises—and what wonderful roses! A paradise of flowers!

The three wanderers timidly advanced, with fast-beating hearts, but unchallenged by any guardian. Presently they reached some steps leading down to a second terrace. Here the water of the canal splashed in a tiny cascade to the lower level.

The principal feature of this second flagged terrace was a giant poplar, which leaned out over

the water as if its rustling leaves were constantly talking with the waves. So low did this poplar lean, that Nancy almost feared that it would lose its balance and topple over into the sea.

And the children were near the white house. Would any one stop them? Or were they, perhaps, moving in a dream over enchanted ground? The sea made a sing-song, whispering a chant both sad and sweet.

Then something happened which took them by surprise. A door on the lower terrace opened, and a woman dressed in black stepped out into the blazing sunshine. Her gown trailed in long folds behind her, and on her head she wore a veil which fell over her shoulders to the ground. Slowly she advanced across the terrace. Then, seating herself on the low stone parapet toward the sea, she gazed wistfully over the water, as one might do who was waiting for some one to return.

The Queen! All in black! How sad she looked! And how lovely, Nancy thought. Would they dare to approach her as they had done in the quaint old castle in the hills? Would she ever

see them? And, wondered Nancy, would she recognize them?

If only the Princess with the great blue eyes were there, she would tell them what to do! As if their thoughts had called her thither, there was Ileana descending a flight of stone steps from one of the upper terraces! She, too, was all in black, but her dress was cut Turkish-wise. And just imagine! She was barefooted, as were all of the Tartar girls whom Nancy had seen in the neighborhood.

Imagine Nancy's surprise at finding a Princess barefooted.

"Mother," exclaimed Ileana, "here are our three little friends from Brana. Isn't it wonderful that they have made the journey and arrived safely?" And hurrying gracefully toward them, she welcomed them with a radiant smile and with friendly outstretched hands.

The Queen turned her head, and raised her hand to shade her eyes against the sun. "Bring them here," she said. "What a pleasure it is to see them again."

Ileana led the three wanderers toward her.

"So you've come all of that long journey on foot! What wonderful children you are! I should never have been able to walk such a long, long journey."

And when the Queen said, "Such a long journey," Nancy had the feeling that she was thinking of another journey which had been long, long . . . to this day of mourning.

"We saw the black on the flags," said Nancy, almost in a whisper.

"And you understood what it meant?" The Queen's voice was sad.

"The people told us."

"He earned his rest," said the Queen, simply. "He worked long for his country, and he was very tired at the end. He, too, had traveled a long way."

"The people are sad," whispered Nancy. She hardly knew why she said this, but her heart went out to the Queen, who looked strangely lonely.

"They loved him," the Queen nodded. "I am

sure that they loved him—and that was his reward!"

"But I think that they love you, too!" said Nancy.

"Yes, I think that they do," said the Queen. "But I am still here . . . and one never knows where a road may end."

"But you are happy to be here, aren't you?" Nancy could not imagine that the Queen would not be happy to have a long way yet before her. Life was so wonderful, and it held so much to see and to discover. Besides, the Queen must be happy when she had both this cozy white house by the Sea, and that splendid castle in the hills—and such a winsome daughter as Ileana!

A smile came to the Queen's face, and illumined it as with sunshine.

"Yes, little Nancy, I am happy to be here. How ungrateful I should be if I did not love all this beauty: the Sea, my little white house, and all these flowers. I am happy, too, for every kind word said to me, for every smile given to me—and grateful for the sympathy shown me in my grief.

From America, little Nancy, I have received countless tokens of love and understanding. Americans are warm-hearted."

The Queen turned her head to look over the sea. Her eyes were sad, but there was something peaceful about her. There was no revolt in her grief.

"I longed to bring him here to rest. He had never seen my little house after it was finished, nor did he ever see how beautifully my flowers have blossomed. He was fond of flowers. But I suppose that the peace that our dear King has found in Heaven is greater than any rest which we could have given him here."

Dobre's and Florica's great eyes were fixed on the Queen. They stood silent and reverent. Each time that the Queen mentioned the name of the King, they crossed themselves, and murmured: "May God rest his soul in peace!"

"Yes," echoed the Queen, "in peace! It was that which he needed. There had been but little of tranquillity in his life of late. The beautiful words of our burial service say: 'In a green place

to rest.' It makes me see deep green meadows, full of shade and flowers." And again she said wistfully, "He was fond of flowers."

"Mother," exclaimed Ileana, "you must show them your lily walk. It is beautiful just now. Mother has given a name to each of her gardens—and she has used our names! There were six of us once, you know!"

"What did you name this terrace, on which the house is built?"

In a low voice the Queen answered: "This is called the Carol Terrace. He was my eldest child, and our great hope. He left us . . . to live in a far country. But I often think that he must have great *dor* for the land of his birth—and I named this terrace after him."

Then, the Queen pointed to a wee, fairy-like garden, full of white lilies which hung suspended above a high stone wall.

"That is the Mircea garden. He was a tiny boy with fair hair and brown eyes. God took him from us during the war. Neither Carol nor Mircea ever saw this beloved corner near the sea."

Ileana bent toward the Queen, and spoke tenderly. "Mother," she said, "do show them your lilies, which you call 'a dream come true.' "

The Queen turned with a smile, and looked up into her daughter's face. Nancy thought that she could read an affectionate understanding in their eyes.

"Ileana knows what to say to her mother when she looks back instead of forward."

The Queen had risen to her feet, and she stood tall and black against the blue sea. "But we must not hark back. It is weakness to do so. At this hour when my heart is heavy, I must remember the motto which the King adopted during the war —my saying that 'To-morrow is yours if you have strength to grasp it.' He lived up to it. I must try to do the same." The Queen spoke solemnly. Fascinated, with wide open eyes, the three children stared at her. And Nancy thought, "Her dress is blacker than the blue Black Sea."

"But come," said the Queen, taking Nancy's hand in her own, "let me show you my lilies—my lovely dream come true."

CHAPTER XXXIII

A lovely dream come true! Indeed, what could have been more beautiful than the Queen's lily walk!

Imagine two rows of milk-white columns used as a pergola! Staves of wood were stretched from one capital to the other, and over them roses were climbing. On both sides of the columns were long beds of white madonna lilies. So shiningly pure were these flowers that they stood as if they were tall silver lights against the shining blue of the Sea.

The whole length of this lily walk was paved with huge, round millstones, one beside the other. At the very end was a round stone seat against a wall which inclosed the garden; and here one of the millstone slabs had been used as the top for a table. A cluster of bright flowers grew in the center of the table, in the round hole in the millstone. The idea delighted Nancy.

How white the lilies looked in contrast to the Queen's somber veils. She was like a nun in a cloister garden. Nancy had once seen a picture of something like this, but this scene, she thought to herself, was more beautiful than the picture.

"How do you like 'my dream come true'?" asked the Queen, when they reached the end of the walk. "And my walk of millstones? You see, I had a collection of them—although you may be amused at my making it. But I bought several old Turkish mills because they were so picturesque that I did not want them to be pulled down. And then I had all of the old millstones! They were useful for my lily walk!"

Nancy was speechless with rapture. Hands clasped in ecstasy, she looked at the lilies, at the Sea, at the white pillars—and at the picture of the black-robed woman who was outlined against this luminous setting.

"Mother calls this the Sandro Terrace," explained Ileana, "because the King of Serbia gave her the white columns. They came all the way from Dalmatia. Sandro, who is really called

Alexander, is my sister Mignon's husband. Her garden is just above this terrace. And above that is my garden! Then comes little Michael's garden. And then Peter's—he is my sister Mignon's little boy. And above Peter's garden is the Ferdinand Terrace—my father's terrace. The two terraces which you passed were the Nicholas and Elizabeth Terraces. And everywhere Mother has planted flowers which remind her of some one!"

"These white lilies were given to me by a good American friend," explained the Queen. "When they came up so magnificently, I wrote to him to say that his lilies were three hundred shouts of thanksgiving."

"Mother has so many ideas," exclaimed Ileana, "that we often seem to be running to catch up with them. On the fountain of water which flows from beneath our large trees, Mother has carved:

"'For those who thirst: water!
For the weary: rest!
Peace unto the heavy-laden!
Hope unto the beginners of life!'"

"Ileana will show you our home and the spacious white room which looks out over the sea," said the Queen. "And she will show you more about these many-named gardens—especially the Mircea garden, which is my favorite. Then she will give you all sorts of good things to eat. And this evening you must see the lily walk, for in the moonlight it becomes a fairyland—a dream-picture which is almost too full of beauty for this sad world."

Ileana clasped her mother's hand. "Mother," she said, "you'll make many another dream come true! That is the reward of one who sows seeds."

"Ileana is my most ardent follower," smiled the Queen. "We dream together and build together. She 'carries on.' One day, she will leave me to 'carry on' in a far land, for that is the destiny of princesses. I, too, came from afar. And, little Nancy—strange as it may seem—whenever I bend down to inhale the perfume of my lilies by the Black Sea, their fragrance reminds me of a little garden I loved when I was a child—a garden which belonged to old Queen Victoria. Each

time that I smell my own lilies here, I see that other little garden. Human feelings are hard to explain, but with the poet, I say:

" 'I will not shut me from my kind;
And, lest I stiffen into stone,
I will not ease my heart alone,
Nor feed with sighs the passing wind.' "

Seeing a blank look on Nancy's face, the Queen smiled, bent down and kissed her.

"Go, little girl, or I'll confuse you. I've too many thoughts to-day. Ileana will be better company for way-weary wanderers, who must be hungry and thirsty. If I were you, Ileana, I would feed and rest them first, and show them the gardens afterward."

"And I'll take them out in my boat," cried Ileana. "I'm sure that they'll like that!"

"Ileana is a sort of mermaid," laughed the Queen. "I'm surprised that she doesn't take you out for a swim!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

That was perhaps the most wonderful of all the days which Nancy spent in Roumania—that day at Tenha Yuvah, the Queen's White House on the Black Sea. And Nancy has never forgotten that the Black Sea was not black at all but blue—ah, so blue!

And, although she did not know it at the time, this was to be Nancy's last day in the Land of the Rising Sun.

The charming Princess with the pansy eyes and the bare feet made it a day of wonder for the three children. What a delightful companion she was! First of all, as her mother had advised, she fed them with all sorts of good things. Cakes, biscuits, jams of every variety, and delicious, hot little rolls, thickly buttered.

They sat on a covered balcony, looking out over the sea, "where Mother and I sleep—out of doors, American-wise," explained Ileana.

The china from which they ate was as yellow as

buttercups, and each piece had a border of peacock-colored leaves which shone in the sunlight as do the wings of Brazilian butterflies. Nancy was entranced by the bright silver coffee-pots; each of which had a small silver parrot on the top instead of a knob! There was also a fat earthenware pot in the form of an orange pumpkin—and in that pot there was honey! And some of the heavy silver spoons had tiny ships as handles, while others had queer little sea-horses. What amusing spoons!

The flat silver bowl which stood in the center of the table was filled with the most wonderfully colored roses that Nancy had ever seen—roses of a red, coppery orange, difficult to describe. "These," Ileana said, "were Father's favorite roses."

All the cushions and chair coverings were bright orange to match the roses—and so, also, were the curtains of the dining-room. The dining-room had a huge, white, Turkish fireplace of the quaintest shape, which was unlike anything to be seen in any other place.

Everything was quaint, original, enchanting—and everything was different from what Nancy had seen at the little castle at Brana, although no less delightful.

"Mother is eager to have her surroundings beautiful in every detail," explained Ileana. "She says that they need not be rich or costly, but that each object must be suitable to its setting."

In Tenha Yuvah this was true. Everything suited its surroundings. Perhaps it was this which gave Nancy such a sense of contentment of body and soul.

Dobre and Florica, with their great, solemn eyes, were drinking in all that they saw, but they asked fewer questions than Nancy; and, in their peasant way, they never seemed to be astonished by anything. They were more shy than Nancy at being invited to sit down to table with a Princess. But perhaps that was because this table was so different from the low "*mamaliga* table" in Baba Zoë's hut!

The Princess was as good as her word, and

really did take them for a sail in her small boat. She handled the sails cleverly. To help her, there was only a Turkish boy, who wore a fez on his head, and was called Hassan. He had very white teeth and a freckled nose. He and the Princess joked together as true friends.

The Queen's white house was still whiter when seen from the sea. From afar it was as white as the lilies in the Sandro colonnade, and it seemed to shine with light. Nancy felt that it was keeping guard over them.

Tenha Yuvah, the Solitary Nest!

Nancy gazed and gazed. She wanted to remember every detail, so that he could describe it all to Granny, when she went home. How wonderful to possess two such enchanting dwellings: the little castle of Brana in the mountains, and this white Turkish house on the Black Sea!

"But you must not imagine," explained Ileana, "that we always live in such small houses. At Bucharest, Mother has a large palace with many rooms and with many servants—with soldiers on guard, who blow a trumpet whenever we go out,

or whenever we come home from a drive. And it has a great park around it.

"But Mother runs away to her small homes as often as she can, because we love to live where we can be outdoors all day long. In palaces, life is not like that. Mother says that you should be able to step out of your home on every side and on every level—for then you are really free!

"But around our palace home, Mother has planted more roses than have ever been planted in any other place. She wants it to be like Sleeping Beauty's castle, which had so many roses that one could hardly get through them. But if we can't get through them, we can get around them!"

How the Princess could laugh! And then her eyes sparkled, and the Turkish boy laughed with her, even when he did not understand what the joke was about. No wonder that Ileana was a joy to the Queen in her sorrow.

After landing, when their boat trip was over, Ileana and her little guests went up to the Carol Terrace. At one end of it, stood an ancient stone cross, sternly outlined against the sea; and by the

side of this cross grew a rose-bush with roses which seemed to Nancy as red as those which grew by her little bungalow at home. Suddenly she stood still, as if she were turned to stone; then she darted to the rose-bush and exclaimed:

"Are you my friend, come to bloom here by the Black Sea?"

And can you believe it? The bush actually answered, singing ever so softly, in a queer little voice:

"Little Nancy, return to your home!
Your mysterious journey is done:
Return from the Queen, and the Land
At the verge of the bright Rising Sun!

"My roots lie deep,
Nor do they sleep
As mortals think. I know
What I have spied
Where secrets hide
Beneath the silent snow.

"If go you must,
Oh, ever trust

The red, red rose—your friend:
For she'll be near
To guard you, dear,
Where'er your steps may trend."

There was a pause, and then Nancy once more heard the red rose singing:

"With your friends you have trudged through the dust
Of the roads which have led to the sea,
You have slept in the light of the stars
With the land of the Turk in the lee.

"To your far away home you must go,
Where your granny is waiting for you.
Bid farewell to the friends you have made,
And return to the arms of old Sue!

"Fare east, fare west—
Home's ever best!"

"They're calling me home!" cried Nancy, aghast. "The rose-bush is calling me home!

Florica, what shall I do?" Tears of distress stood in her eyes, for Nancy's heart was torn between East and West.

Florica stood quite still. Her gaze was fixed upon the sea. It seemed to Nancy that no one else in the world could stand as still as Florica, the little peasant who once had been a doll.

At length she said: "I'll do the trick again." But her voice was very low, and it trembled—because Florica had become so very fond of Nancy!

Nancy turned and looked at Dobre, but he would not face the little stranger. He did not want her to see that there were tears in his eyes.

"What is it, children?" It was Ileana who asked this question, for she had seen that something was amiss.

"This is my friend, the red rose," explained Nancy. "She tells me that I must go home to Granny. She says that Granny hasn't slept a wink since I left home."

The Princess did not seem at all astonished that the red rose should have given Nancy such a message. I suppose that the Queen had taught

Ileana how to speak with roses and lilies, with the waves, and the sea-gulls, and with the four winds which howl around the towers of the Castle of Brana.

"If the red rose says that your poor grandmother hasn't slept since you left her, I'm afraid that you must hurry back to her as quickly as you can!"

"Florica can do the trick," said Nancy; "but the Queen said that I must see the lilies in the moonlight." The little girl was close on the verge of tears.

"I don't imagine that it will matter much if you spend a few more hours here. We'll keep you until the moon comes, and the lily garden turns to a dream—and then we will ask the clever Florica to conjure you back to your grandmother. If she can do that, you can wake up to-morrow morning in your own little bed! What fun!"

How did Ileana understand so well about such things?

Florica looked up at her, and a knowing smile passed between the Princess and the peasant child. They did not seem to need words.

Then Ileana noticed that the shepherd boy was silent. She took his hand kindly.

"You are sad, Dobre?"

Dobre looked at her with large eyes. "Yes, I am sad. I am fond of the little stranger. We've walked many a long mile together. I've played my sweetest tunes to her. And for many a day and many a night, I have protected her."

"And we've broken bread together," added Florica.

"We have quenched our thirst with refreshing water from the same wells," sighed the shepherd. "And, sitting hand in hand, we have watched more than one moon rise."

"Together, you will see the moon rise to-night," said the Princess.

"But after that?" asked the boy.

"After that, you will have a fond memory to cherish: memory to give new beauty to your sheep and your flute, to your plains and your hills, to your dreams, Dobre."

How wise Ileana was! Almost as wise as the peasants themselves!

"But come with me now," she added, "and rest in our great room, among its masses of flowers of every color. And I will show you the many silver lamps which hang near my mother's bed, and I will tell you a story which she once told to me, when my heart was sad!"

Yes, Ileana was wise. And her heart had taught her the way in which to talk to these three children, who felt the hour of parting creeping toward them, as if it were a shadow of blackness.

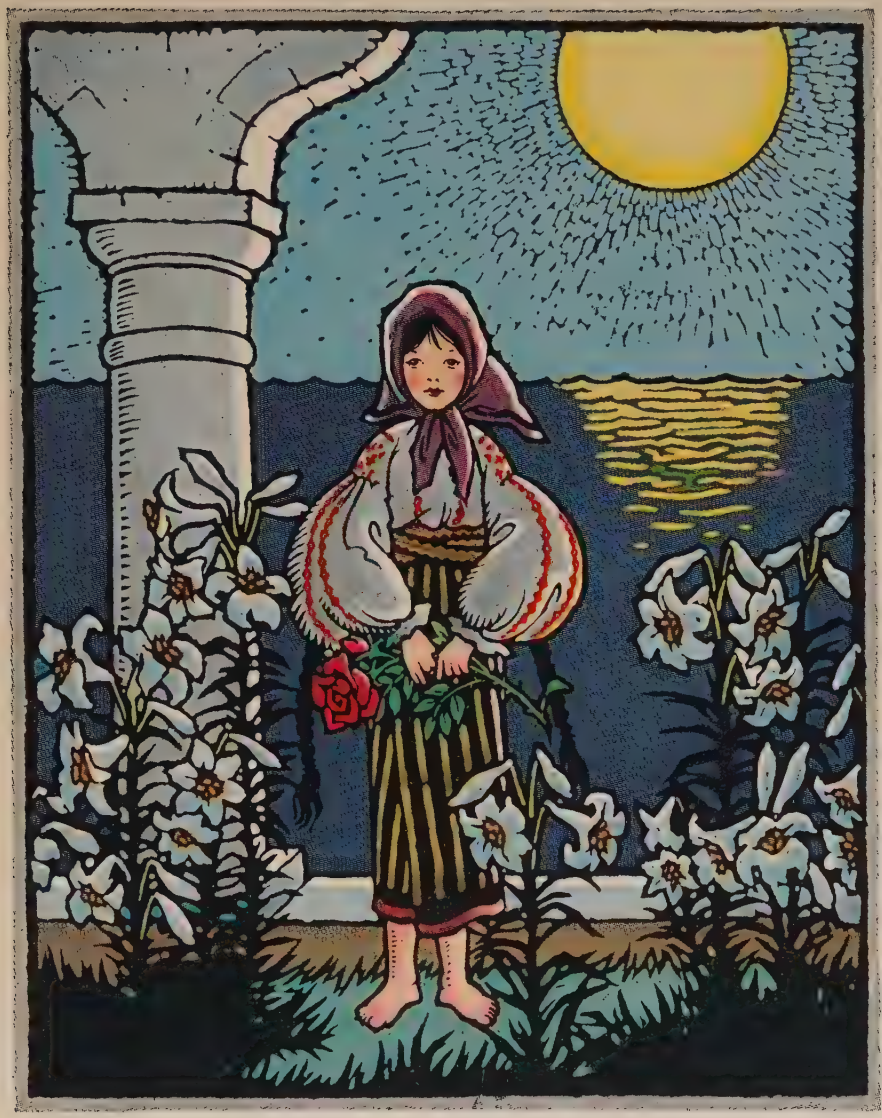
CHAPTER XXXV

That night, on the Queen's terrace, the three companions watched the moon rise.

Hand in hand, they stood for the last time, and allowed the mystery and the wonder of the silvery night to sink into their souls.

And it was under the white colonnade that Nancy said good-by to the Queen. The air was full of the fragrance of the lilies—that sweet, heavy fragrance which reminded the Queen of a garden that she had loved as a child.

The white pillars, with the white flowers beneath them, stood like ghosts against the water, which was now a really truly Black Sea—but a Black Sea shot through with silver, as if it were a magic tissue woven by fairy hands. The moon hung low in the sky, an enormous shining shield tracing a silver path on the dark waters. It dwarfed the stars, and humbled them.



"THERE SHE STOOD, HOLDING THE RED ROSE IN HER HAND."

There, among the lilies, the Queen bent down, kissed the little stranger, and slipped into her hand a small golden locket.

"Forget my black veils, Nancy, and think of me as a Queen with a golden crown, and without grief! Good-by, little stranger. Perhaps the day will come when I will return to America. And when I do, I will truly stop at your door, and ask old Black Sue to let me in. Good-by, my dear, good-by. . . ."

There remained in Nancy's memory a fleeting vision of Ileana's lustrous eyes, and the picture of Dobre, as white as the pillars and as the lilies beneath them—of dear Dobre who had been so kind and so protective. He, too, had bent down and kissed the little stranger. And, as he did so, he had pressed his precious wooden flute into her hand—a parting gift!

And in Nancy's memory will also linger, as long as she lives, that last glimpse of Florica—her magic doll of Roumania, who had whisked her across the seas. There she stood, so wise in life and its mysteries, holding the red rose in her hand—the red,

red rose—which Nancy now knew was growing in two places at the same time!

But now there were nowhere to be seen any of those somber birds of mystery which Nancy had seen in her dream of the Haiduc. But afterward she seemed to remember having seen a sea-gull with silver wings. But of this she was not quite sure.

And—was that the red rose's voice? For she could hear a song which she had already heard once before!

"My roots lie deep,
Nor do they sleep
As mortals think. I know
What I have spied
Where secrets hide
Beneath the silent snow."

There was a pause, and then Nancy once more heard the red rose singing:

"If go you must,
Oh, ever trust

The red, red rose—your friend:
For she'll be near
To guard you, dear,
Where'er your steps may trend."

The singing stopped, and Nancy gave a start. "Florica!" she gasped, "Florica! Where are you?"

. . . . . .

"Granny!"

"Oh, my child! What a fright you have given me!"

And there sat Granny, almost speechless with surprise. Her spectacles had fallen, unnoticed, into her lap.

Granny! And behind her, old Sue—hands in air, and teeth as white as the Queen's lilies! Tears like great dew-drops were running down her ebony cheeks.

"Law bless you, Honey! My young un has come back! You li'l rascal! Ole Sue's heart done cracked right in two! And now it's whole again! Lawzie, Lawzie!"

"Granny—I've come back."

"But what's done happen to you, chile?" Old Sue was horrified. And in truth Nancy was a sur-

prising sight! Bronzed by the sun, hardened by the wind, with tattered dress and worn-out shoes, and with her fair hair an unkempt, tousled mass which hung about her face, she was indeed a grimy

and ragged urchin as she stood before them. But for all that, she was clutching in one hand a small golden locket, which carried, within, the miniature of a queen, if you please! And Nancy knew that it was a real queen, with a real crown of gold upon her head! And clutched in her other hand was a little wooden flute—an absurd little ten-cent wooden flute!

"Nancy, Nancy!" Granny could say nothing else! Tears choked her voice. And again she repeated, "Nancy!"

"And I've come back without Florica!" exclaimed the ragged little girl. "The red rose told me that it was time to come home. I found her growing near the Black Sea, too."

Granny was understanding less and less.

"The red rose?"

"Yes. And the Princess said that it would be best for me to listen to the rose, for it told me that you hadn't slept since I left home."

"Lawzie, Lawzie, what's de chile sayin'?"

"And, Granny, I left the Queen among her lilies by the Black Sea—and it isn't black at all; it's blue!

And the moon was shining, and the fragrance of the lilies reminded the Queen of a garden which she had loved when she was a little girl—and it belonged to Queen Victoria, the garden did! And her lilies—the Queen's lilies, I mean—are a dream come true! And Ileana sails her own little boat—with a Turkish boy who has freckles on his nose! And the silver coffee-pots have tiny parrots for knobs. And the Queen's little castle has a staircase in it! And, Granny! The Haiduc is not a real person; it's only in the songs that he steals the maiden's hearts. But I dreamed about him; he was very bold and handsome—and the Queen was visiting him with her crown on! And, Granny—do you know?—Roumania is near the Rising Sun, and that's why even the small girls sing songs which are so strange that we American girls can't understand them!"

"Nancy, Nancy! Wait a minute! Don't try to tell me so much all at once! You'll drive me crazy, my dear! And how you do look! I've never seen such a little scare-crow. I would scarcely have recognized you, if I'd met you in the street!"

"But I *am* Nancy—your own little Nancy!" She earnestly assured her. Certainly those were Nancy's eyes which were staring up out of her grimy, sunburned face. And they might have been two small pieces torn from the sky.

"But, Granny!" And now there was a pathetic tremble in her granddaughter's chin—a wee tremble which would have made your eyes a trifle moist to see. "Florica wouldn't come back with me. She is no longer a doll. And she says that Roumanians cannot live away from their own country, for if they did, their hearts would break with *dor*."

"*Dor!* Whatever does the precious child mean? And why are there tears in her eyes? Come here, Nancy, my child, and let me kiss you!"

Then Nancy threw herself into her grandmother's arms. And as she did so, she burst into tears!

"It's because—" she sobbed, "because my heart is so full of *dor* for Florica, for Dobre—and for the Queen—and for Ileana! Granny, Roumania really *is* the land near the Rising Sun! And truly

the Black Sea is not black at all, but blue—ever so blue! And the setting sun there turns everything to pink and orange! Oh, it is beautiful! And the Queen—!"

"Well, I have never heard such a thing before! Never!" Granny's cap was askew. This was all very perplexing, she thought to herself, and really, Nancy *must* have a bath—and how her hair needed to be cut! Never before had the child been so untidy.

Granny shook her head. "It will take me a month to understand all this! It's too confusing! What queer ideas are these that the child is chattering about? And when she comes home so suddenly—and in such a state—it takes my breath away!

"But at any rate, thank Heaven! That uncanny doll—which was not a doll—has stayed where she belonged, in the land of the Rising Sun, by the Black Sea, which is blue! I have never heard such nonsense!

"But this experience has taught me something! No more foreigners for me, if you please! It's

never safe to let one of them into your house—not even a foreign doll!"

Then Granny's eyes fell upon the small golden locket. She took it gently from Nancy's hand, and opening it, looked at the picture of the Queen. "Well," she observed, grudgingly, "she's a real queen anyway—see her crown! It's very handsome, my dear! But still, as for foreigners—no, I thank you! No more of them for me!"

But in spite of Granny's objections to foreigners, Nancy knew one fact:

EAST AND WEST *had* MET!

THE END